



Radio on the road to 2010

Let me begin by saying that we are here to stay, as we have reincarnated as a medium. The road forward rests on the novelty of the offering, the hegemony one builds in a market and the collective efforts that the Radio broadcasters invest in circumventing all impediments that has a bearing on the category growth.

Clearly, novelty in content and marketing efforts will be a differentiator and the brand builder. Though there are many more initiatives on the drawing board that the regulatory authorities would start unleashing, and from which the medium would benefit immensely, the focus needs to be on what would give a radio brand the head start in a prematurely cluttered market.

Considering the heterogeneity of key markets, the content diet needs to be layered across segments of audience.

One can't be niche in sourcing advertising. Hence, layering would mean creating content to satisfy the hugely cross-pollinated population of today, intensifying time band consumption, advertising needs, integrating brand options - in other words, it has to be more radio per radio.

I read an interesting note which says that the Radio Advertising in UK identified two types of listeners: Habitual and Discretionary.

Habitual are the ones who listen during peak time and Discretionary are the ones who make an appointment to listen.

So we need to create programming of the latter kind.

And what do you see when this happens?

You begin to take your listener along at different points in a day, align with his mindset, take a break, meet the lady or ladies in his life, the kids and every other who complete his existence and return to him when he winds up during the day. This then need to be replicated to reach out different demographic profiles, however niche, with a content formula that doesn't drive the core group away.

In our case, we have also carved a name for having the best English show band on Sundays, while we shout from the roof of being a clean and quality Tamizh radio brand. Going English for three hours on Sunday brings with it choicest advertising too.

Let me attempt a synergy - in today's world you walk into a mall and find your food courts which exist in perfect harmony to treat your food fetishes... likewise, creating a palette of offerings for the listener is mandatory, an entertainment court if you will.

Rarely do you find a moment when you can funnel down an advertiser and say you can't reach my audience...it just isn't an option today when offerings of brands and products have completely removed any segmentation in buyers...

You know, it's like this... as sales people often tell me,

every money for advertising out in the market is my money... it's how much I can take out of the pie. Likewise, any listener is a buyer of any product at any point in time.

So what does that leave us with? Addressing sensibilities.

Demarcate metro markets Vs the rest, and that is the biggest challenge as we expand. In the coming days with launch of stations in B & C towns, there is a lot of education that we need to carry out among all our business constituents.

The Sales force, whom we call Radio Planners, will have to be taken into confidence in placement of communication, as we have shows with varied content and timings that addresses the station and its audience needs.

At the end of the day, if bottomline is what will differentiate us in the business, then it needs to be different programming options focused across segments, aiding advertising requirements and ensuring that the grab of the pie is done efficiently and smoothly.

Hegemony

Talking about advertising bucks, with most creative houses still exploring the ways and means of using Radio as a medium; to record growth at a frenetic pace would be to work against the stream. The sooner Radio would be perceived as a threat for other medium - however complimenting Radio is stated to be - more fueled would be the radio mission to conquer. And to conquer markets, radio as a medium should facilitate strategic use of the medium across a given market. Better still, when one brand of Radio can offer the platform including the B and C towns that constitute 60 per cent of the state's market potential value.

This factor of totality of market reach becomes crucial in a state like TamilNadu as National media brands hardly foray to deliver a large audience. Hence Radio would catapult to a recognized alternative medium only when it aids reaching out pan market.

Collective Responsibility

However competitive, collectively we have to win the technological advancement that radio as a medium has seen in formative markets the world over. HD Radio that permeate multiple channels per frequency and also satiate the needs to have niche programming, needs collective representation at the highest level to mark its early advent in our country. I fear digitization of AM transmission in our domain without FM transmission upgraded to HD mode, as we would also have to grapple with better sounding state owned channels.

News and Current affairs programming is again an area for joint initiatives and I am happy that there are efforts already underway to make this happen. FM Radio, as a medium, then, has truly evolved.

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