

The Dumbing Down Of Radio

An **EXCLUSIVE**

"PD" Special Report

By John Sebastian

Coming with every challenge there is an opportunity. Radio today has a critical challenge *and* opportunity with the ever-digressing state of the product we're putting on the airwaves. There are exceptions to this statement, thank God, but these anomalies are becoming less prevalent every day.

Problem/Challenge

The combination of drastically increased commercial loads, increased chit-chat (especially outside of AM Drive), less use of music research, and fewer dollars for marketing is driving away listeners from not just individual stations, but from radio in general. This new adherence to

"lowest common denominator" radio is making it almost *impossible* for many upscale, well-educated, intelligent listeners to listen.

Yes, our industry is making lots of money within this mediocrity. But it makes us painfully vulnerable to attack from the right (Continued — See *Dumbing Down* on page 2)

The **5** CURSE of the 5-Hour Rotation

(And Other Secrets Of Music Science)

As a further prelude to the return of the **TW** Hot-Clock Games series, we will continue to put forward useful "background" theories about rotational harmonics and other intricacies of music scheduling.

A technique used by many PDs seeking to increase their TSL is to relax the tautness of their music rotations, hoping to minimize repetition perception with "average" (short- to medium-span) listeners. But loosening a tier from 4 hours to 5 hours (or, for that matter, from 2 hours to 2½ hours, which ultimately intersects (Continued — See *5-Hour Curse* on page 4)

Continuing Education For The Dedicated Radio Programmer

**Inside
"PD"
Issue
27**

Page 2 The Asshole Factor, Part 2 (David Ogilvy)

Page 5 Chap *Snap!* (Ron Chapman, KVIL)

Page 6 Making "Turn On Your Computer/Radio" *Come Alive*

Special 6-Page Insert "TW Tips Index" (Issues #13-26)

1000-The Audience	2000-Music	3000-Promotion/Marketing
4000-Contests	5000-Mornings	6000-Talent
7000-Leadership	8000-Morale	9000-Presentation
10000-News/Surveillance	11000-Public Service	12000-Operations
13000-Talk	14000 - Technical	15000 - Internet
16000 - Computers	17000 - Sales	18000 - Production
19000 - Research	20000 - Ratings	21000 - Life
22000 - Bookshelf	Great Quotes	Ocean Toons



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The Dumbing Down Of Radio

(Continued . . . from Page 1)

competitor. I'm hearing mistakes and oversights that a group of us programmers learned and created resolutions for 20 and 30 years ago.

Solution/Opportunity

Individuals, stations, or a significant group of stations have the unique chance to take competitive advantage of these vulnerabilities.

Put the product (programming) on a pedestal again.

On a music station, *music is everything*. Music research is essential to get the product correct (while having enough experience to use one's intuition is critical in the *interpretation* of the results of that research).

Marketing and advertising is what radio is all about. We market and advertise our radio stations every day to listeners on our airwaves. And to advertisers. How can we tell a potential client that we believe in our product, and therefore they should buy spots on our station, but then not advertise on other mediums ourselves? We're showing through our actions that we really don't believe in advertising.

Finally this rebel, hypothetical group of stations needs to commit themselves to running low commercial loads again, while *escalating the cost per unit* enough to compensate in the longer run. And don't forget to rid the stations of all that needless, mindless, inane chatter.

If you really want to do something,
you'll find a way;
if you don't,
you'll find an excuse

TW Tip #7158

Result

I guarantee these exceptional radio stations will experience

- Much higher TSL
- Better Exclusive Cume
- A Qualitative profile that ranks among the highest in their respective markets
- A significant maximization of the overall ratings of each station
- And ultimately *more revenue and bottom-line profit*.

Best of all: the chance that a competitor would challenge you in this position is lessened dramatically (as most stations continue to add commercial clutter and de-emphasize their commitment to marketing).

The Reality

Whatever happened to selling qualitative data? We seem to be moving away from this highly effective tool.

If you sell the *kind* of listener you have, you'll survive the inevitable ebbs and flows of the Arbitron ratings.

In the last five programming gigs I've had, we made the radio stations better in all of these areas of salability, especially qualitatively, by using the aforementioned philosophies. It's worked in Country, NAC, Rock, and Classic Rock. And, I submit, it will work for every music format on the air today (and tomorrow).

(Continued — See *Dumbing Down* on page 3)

"The Asshole Factor" — Revisited

**"If you're nice, but not talented, you're not for us.
If you're talented, but not nice, you're not for us either,
because life is too short to live and work with sons of bitches!"**

— Legendary advertising guru **David Ogilvy**
addressing an audience of Australian media types, circa 1985

TW Tip #6082, #7157, and #8042

Special thanks to subscriber **Les Heil** for reminding us of these words of wisdom

Christmas Traffic

Traffic report monitored on Christmas Eve . . .

**" . . . and as I fly over the mall, I see all the Jewish
merchants dancing in the parking lot and singing
What A Friend We Have In Jesus."**

(Don't go quoting me on this!)

The Dumbing Down Of Radio

"Good is never enough!"

— *Debbi Fields, Mrs. Fields Cookies*

TW Tip #7159

(Continued . . . from Page 2)

A Tale Of Two Cities

In markets of every size, we see the potential for betterment or vulnerability. Let's take Los Angeles and Phoenix, the last two markets I've worked in, as current examples.

In LA, the top three radio stations in 25-54 Adults subscribe to the theories I'm espousing.

■ KLVE and KSCA (under the direction of **Bill Tanner** and his great staff) are one and two consistently now. They have researched the Hispanic audience and music thoroughly. The stations are streamlined and very music conscious. And they run a very low commercial load compared to nearly every other major station in Southern California.

■ **Jhani Kaye** at KOST continues his brilliant attention to detail. After all these years, he still adheres to these rules. It's no accident that KOST has been the most consistent adult winner in LA radio for the last 10 years. They're now third 25-54, well ahead of any other non-Hispanic station in the market (no easy feat). KOST researches their product flawlessly, allows no excess talk, and runs no more than 10 units an hour.

Phoenix is led again by KNIX, perhaps (quietly) the best-run radio station in the nation. They are #1 in the fastest growing major metro market in America because *they pay attention to these critical details*. They possess an in-house research department that I think is the best in the country. They market and advertise themselves more aggressively than any other Phoenix radio station, by far. KNIX has a fine, well-known morning team in Tim & Willy. And they make the music most important, with little chatter and the fewest commercials of any of the major stations in the market.

These two markets are not aberrations. One could make the same case in market after market, the world over.

Why don't we give these highly unusual #1 stations some competition?

The combination of *attention to detail in programming pursuits* and *commitment to the product* never fails!

It's worked for me with every station I've programmed in 30 years. FM music radio is now at a crossroads. We will either respond to this opportunity or eventually face the fate of AM music stations of 20-25 years ago.

I've been truly blessed to be involved with some great people in creating some of the boldest turnarounds in American radio history. In many different formats:

- ✓ At WCOZ/Boston, we went from worst-to-first in every major demographic in less than a year (the best showing ever in major market Rock annals)
- ✓ At KTWW (The Wave) in Los Angeles, we rose from 13th to 1st 25-54 in less than 8 months (the most dramatic showing in the life of the NAC format).
- ✓ KSLX/Phoenix skyrocketed from 14th to 1st 25-54 in under 12 months.
- ✓ Most recently, at KZLA, we gained from a 1.6 share to a 2.9 showing, 25-54 (that's a *huge* rise in the competitive LA market). Despite operating Country, the *least-ethnic* format in radio (in the most ethnic major market in America), KZLA gained almost 300,000 Cumme persons, making it the #1 Country station in the nation (for the first time). Our great staff also accomplished dramatic increases in TSL, Exclusive Cumme, and in our Qualitative profile.

All of the favorable examples outlined here have one thing in common: each station used the principles listed above to pull off these amazing ratings gymnastics.

I truly love radio. It's all I've ever done now for 30 years (and I'm only 48)! But I'm really afraid for the demise of our industry. This circumstance reminds me of the last days of AM music radio. If we don't learn from the past, we're doomed to repeat it.

To evolve as a business, we must first get back to being at least as good as we were 10 years ago!

This Is A Warning!

We'd better get our act together! If we don't put at least as much emphasis on programming as we do now on sales, satellite radio, internet radio, or some other entity will kick FM's ass someday *real soon*.

TW Tip # 7160



John Sebastian has been a successful programmer in CHR, AOR, Classic Rock, NAC, and Country. His creative slant to radio over the years as a DJ, programmer, consultant, and GM has resulted in many historic ratings records. John is now seeking a position with a company that shares his vision.

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Nothin' But 'Net



Dialectize!

Here's a fun web-site to share with your listeners (and fellow workers): **The Dialectizer from Rinkworks** (a privately owned entertainment web site created by **Samuel Stoddard**, based in New Hampshire).

It translates the content of your customized English text or the visual display of virtually *any* web site (go ahead, try it!) into the dialect of your choice.

How To Dialectize A Web Site:

- Key in www.rinkworks.com/dialect/
- Then key in the URL of the web site you wish to dialectize (like www.cnn.com)

- A pull-down menu gives you the following choices of dialect: Jive, Redneck, Cockney, Elmer Fudd, Swedish Chef, Moron, Pig Latin
- Select the dialect you want, then click the Dialectize button, and *voila!* the visual screen on the entire web site will be in the dialect you chose. In "Fudd", for example, the "wead" story on CNN Intewactive is: "Cwinton's wawyews www defend the pwesident on the facts". (Fiwm at eweven!)

How To Dialectize Your Customized Text:

- Page down to the custom-text box. Enter your text. Select the dialect you want. Click on the dialectize button. Done!

I think someone has way too much time on their hands!

TW Tip #15046 and #16050

The 5-Hour Curse

(Continued — from page 1)

at a 5-hour increment down the road) may actually *increase* the appearance of music repetition on your station.

Here's why: Particularly with listeners whose listening lifestyles are driven by "the 3 drive-times" (morning drive, lunch drive, and afternoon drive), they may, for example, hear the same 5-hour-rotation song played at 7:10am, 12:10pm, and 5:10pm. Thus they'll come away with the (mistaken) impression that said song is on a much higher rotation than it actually is. Unless that's a song they *really* like, this could result in tune-out. And if it happens often enough, it could affect partisanship.

Other factors can compound this effect:

- If rotational categories of 2½ and 10 hours are also featured in the same hour, "double-drive" listeners may hear *three* of the same tunes played during both a 7am and 5pm listen.
- When the same songs are heard coming out of the same stationality

element (e.g., the same ID or promo going into the same song, 5 or 10 hours later) the effect multiplies.

- If your music-scheduling software doesn't automatically double-check to prevent the day-to-day plotting of songs in the same hour, and you try to kick your rotations "backward" a notch to compensate by slotting an extra play of a category during the all-night show (supposedly to *prevent* next-day-play of the same songs in the same hour), the 25th hour, 30th, and 35th hour (where a 5-hour rotation will ultimately intersect) will *again repeat* in the same hours the next day (defeating the very purpose of the notching exercise).
- A similar 5-hour repetition dynamic may also occur around natural coffee-break times in the 10am and 3pm hours (when closer actual foreground "listening" to the radio may occur as part of the workplace relaxation response).

The solution:

Avoid 5-hour, 2½ or 10-hour harmonics

A 2-hour or 4-hour rotation may actually be perceived to have *less* repetition than a 2½ or 5-hour tier because of the cycle of intersecting

harmonics (repeats). The aggregate effect of a "half-way" measure like 2¼ or 4½ (or 2¾ and 5½) hour rotations is enough to prevent (or at least minimize) this phenomenon from repeating too noticeably. (4½ or 5½-hour rotations repeat 9 or 11 hours later, thus getting them out of the natural breakfast-to-drive 10-hour repeat cycle).

Construct clocks with alternating tiers

Try to build-in *offsetting* rotational elements to minimize the perception of repetition. For example, if you want your typical clock-hour to start with Power Gold, Power Current, Current, consider building *two* clocks:

- "Clock A" that features Gold 1, A1, B (which would run odd hours on odd dates; and even hours on even dates)
- alternating with a *complementary* "Clock B" that starts with Gold 2, B, A2 (running even hours on odd dates, odd on evens).

In this way, you *avoid* programming the same song out of the same service-element.

Notch rotations forward. If you still insist on a 5-hour rotation in your system (like some programmers still insist on playing promos first!), instead of notching backward with

(Continued see 5-Hour Curse on page 6)

"Sloppy Joe" Radio

Have you noticed?

Seems we're hearing more and more programming mistakes on-the-air these days. The result of over-worked, or maybe over-stretched PDs. More than at anytime in recent memory.

Scott Shannon, PD of ABC/Disney's WPLJ/New York City, has a colorful term for such careless radio — he calls it "Sloppy Joe Radio".

You know, a promo running on Saturday that says "starting

Friday" (the day before). Out-dated commercials running in October that remind listeners to "get ready for the Summer heat". Liners that haven't been changed for weeks or months.

The message it sends to listeners: You don't care! Not just you, but every employee who comes in contact with it doesn't care enough to tell someone who can get things fixed fast.

Solution: Empower every employee with the authority to take action and pull a spot or promo whenever they hear something that makes the station or the advertiser look stupid.

TW Tip # 7161, #9140, #8043, #17033, and #18015

Ocean Toons®

Check out Bobby Ocean's creative web site at www.bobbyocean.com. Full of interesting ideas, links, quotes, production and voiceover demos. E-Mail Osh at oceanvox@pacbell.net

Jeff Young's Radio 411 (www.radio411.com) is the cyber-home of Ocean Toons and the Bobby Ocean Cartoon Gallery.

MORGAN AND STEELE
IN BOSS RADIO
ROCK & ROLL HEAVEN



HE'S SO MUCH LIKE JACOBS IT'S SCARY.
HE CANT STAND HIS NAME BEING USED IN VAIN

CHAP Snap!

Our *Snap!* series of salutes to great programmers who have left their mark in radio history would not be complete without noting the contributions of legendary Dallas programmer

Ron Chapman

Chapman came to Dallas in 1959, joining Gordon McLendon's KLIF as part of the morning team "Murphy & Harrigan" which later became "Charlie & Harrigan". (Chapman was the first of many "Irving Harrigans", teaming with Tom Murphy and then Jack Woods as "Charlie Brown").

Chapman's superb airwork and presence led to his being tapped by WFAA-TV to host a local bandstand show, *Sump'n Else* in the mid-60's. Considered by many to be the best-produced teen-dance show of its day, its inspired production values were better than national shows.

But it was KVIL where Chapman as Program Manager and Morning Personality worked his most prolific magic. He collaborated with Fairbanks Broadcasting National PD George Johns to create America's first truly successful major market Adult Contemporary station, mixing the best of the upbeat "MOR" songs with the softer rock of the day.

KVIL's stationality was molded in the image of Chapman, an extension of his personality, featuring "morning men around the clock" who added entertaining adult personal-

ity between the songs — from the KVI-L-icopter to heart-warming public service projects and exotic promotions.

A promotional genius, Chapman's "fun and games" were planned by *beginning with the end in mind* and *working backwards* to accomplish what needed to be done. Great example: in a Trinity River Tug-Of-War pitting the KVIL DJs against local celebrities from one of the DFW TV stations, Chapman's instructions to the jocks as they took their positions was: "Lose!" He knew if they won, the clip would never be shown on TV, but if they lost, the TV station would feature it prominently and spell KVIL's name right. (He was right).

The keys to Chapman's success:

- ✓ First and foremost: You will not find a more driven, mission-oriented programmer than Ron Chapman (an energy and momentum you can still feel listening to his morning show today). Getting him to stop working at winning was/is impossible. Always thinking, always calculating new ways to take KVIL higher, and always imparting "sky's the limit" goals a staff can be motivated to achieve.
- ✓ But the *real* secret to his success is: *nobody* loves Dallas more than Ron Chapman — and it shows on-the-air. It's *genuine*, evident in every break, in every name-drop of local names, and every outside event he is part of. The mutual feeling was perhaps best exemplified by the fact that it was Chapman who was chosen to introduce President Ronald Reagan at his visits to North Texas in the 80's.

TW Tip # 3156, #5102, #6083, #8044, and #7162

Programmer's Digest

Turn On Your Computer, Turn On Your Radio II Making Our Pavlovian Campaign *Come Alive*

Some things were just meant to go together. Love and marriage. Traffic and weather. London and Christmas. Pooh and honey.

And . . . computer-use and radio-listening.

By launching an unrelenting campaign to naturally link computer-use and radio-listening together as a Pavlovian effect the average consumer automatically does, **Radio has a great opportunity . . .**

- to **reclaim** the 11-12% of listeners who have acquired the bad habit of using radio less when they use the internet, and
- to condition untold millions of *future* net-surfers to instantly associate web or computer-usage with radio listening to gain "double the enjoyment, and double the entertainment".

For deep background: If you didn't have a chance to read my Food For Thought column on page 12 of Issue #25, I would encourage to go back and do so. In fact, make a copy for your radio friends and fellow workers. I want to see this campaign succeed, big time. Because when it does, it will mean more higher Persons Using Radio for all of us, **at a time when we need it the most.**

The 5-Hour Curse

Continued — from page 4) each new day of music scheduling (by airing an extra play of a rotation all night), consider notching *forward* (by *omitting* one play of a rotation during the 4am hour). In this way, the 5-hour harmonic rolls on to the 26th hour the following day (27th hour the next, etc.) Next week, we'll look at how to avoid repetitive harmonic cycles with your "gold" and library material. *TWTp#2125*

Food For Thought

Why You Should Do It **NOW** — Not Later

You may be thinking, "Why should *my* station be on the front wave of this campaign?". The guinea pig.

Here's why: **you** will reap the *first rewards* of audience increases before the other stations (the lemmings who "wait and see"), thus giving **you** an *immediate competitive edge* (and higher ratings at their expense).

Ultimately my vision is: that every competitive "player" will be using some form of this radio/computer subliminal-coupling as part of their regular stationality. (The last time I had a vision this ubiquitous, it was about the virtues of callout music research and perceptual audience research — and history has proven me right about that!)

How To Start

You can easily begin with just a simple casual reminder liner (though I make the point that *applying frequency to reinforcement of a clever, repetitive slug-line* will better imbed the thought in listeners' minds).

Maybe a contest, tied into the workplace. Like "*The Office Olympics*" ("First person to take my radio dictation and e-mail it to me wins a pair of tickets to the Garth Brooks concert and goes in the draw to win a new laptop computer to take home with you").

In coming issues of "TT", we'll have more specifics, including more "clip-art" style liners, promos, and contests you can customize.

Please — don't ignore my plea! Help me pass the word to other stations in your group! This can be *huge!* And when it works, we can all look back on this major accomplishment with great pride.

TWTp#3155, #4061, #7156, #15045, and #16049

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