

Don Wesley Burden

To Don Burden, a broadcasting veteran at 31, formula radio means going with the "modern trend toward a strictly localized operation that provides a distinct service to the community."

Sometimes this may take the form of an audience-luring treasure hunt for substantial stakes or a parade of "kiss-in' girls" handing out numbered candy kisses to passersby, redeemable for prizes. Listeners aren't apt to forget the station's call letters and, in fact, may be wont to tune in more frequently.

Competitors of The Star Stations among other successful independent station groups—the Bartells and McLendons, the Ploughs and Storzes—may cavil at the Burden approach, but acknowledge it's difficult to argue with success. They can understand, too, because as protagonists of modern radio, they have fought formula with formula in similar attempts to "rock the market."

Western Constellation • Don Burden's meteoric rise in independent radio doubtless is best reflected in the Star Stations' corporate name. He is president and principal stockholder of properties that include KOIL Omaha, Neb.; KICN Denver, Colo., and KISN Portland, Ore. A fourth station, KWIK Pocatello, Idaho, at which Mr. Burden started his career, is owned by the same stockholders (including Mr. Burden) as KOIL.

Industry observers, including his competitors, freely admit that once he stepped into those particular markets, starting six years ago, "there never was a dull moment" in the battle for ratings and revenue leadership. And youthful Mr. Burden never backed off from the free-wheeling fight, trading gimmick for gimmick in distilling his own brand of radio programming formula.

Born Aug. 10, 1928, Don Wesley Burden was valedictorian at Iona (Idaho) High School. He managed to weather lean years and attend Idaho State U. where he majored in advertising. He left in April 1945 to join the Navy, spending over two years in service. After his discharge, he got the radio bug and tried his hand as a salesman as KWIK. He was appointed sales manager in August 1950 and held the post for over three years, honing his ambition in a small-market broadcast operation.

To the Hock Shop • Not one to decline a challenge, Mr. Burden decided to turn entrepreneur and, as he put it,

"to mortgage myself to the hilt and strike out on my own." At a time when network radio was still thriving and modern independent radio had not crystallized into its present form, he went scouring the country "for a sick radio station which could be bought for a minimum of cash and one which had a good earning potential—if it had new life breathed into it."

Mr. Burden found the station and market and laid the groundwork by joining KOIL in Omaha as sales manager in August 1953. He bought it in December for \$165,000 and proceeded with different program formats in a bid to raise ratings and revenue, after dropping its network affiliation. Competing with KOWH (later sold by the Storz Stations), KOIL cut into the former's astronomical audience share under Mr. Burden, a man by now dedicated to a considerable chore. Along with ratings (and the stimulus of "just about every audience-building gimmick in the history of radio," a station spokesman admits), billings have jumped six-fold in nearly six years.

After formation of The Star Stations corporate group in 1954, Mr. Burden set out to conquer new fields. He went back to Pocatello in 1957 and bought KWIK, where he got his start, for \$33,000.

He utilized the same pattern of audience-building shows (contests, audience participations, gimmicks, liberal use of station personalities, including d.j.s) and the station is claimed to have increased its billings about 300% in two years. Its audience share position



STAR STATIONS' BURDEN
Ahead in the formula game

also has improved. (Mr. Burden confides that he recently rejected a \$125,000 bid for KWIK, but reported sale of the station was in negotiation last week).

Spring Fervor • Turning his eyes to Denver in the spring last year, he "spotted a sleeper" in KMYR, paying \$402,000 for an outlet in a market that boasted 19 highly competitive radio stations. The familiar Burden approach again prevailed, drawing national as well as local attention in May 1958 and catching the ears of many listeners. The ingredients: a \$50,000 "Treasure Hunt" that reportedly turned Denver on its ear (loot-seekers converged on property-owners and a local cemetery like ants). Mr. Burden followed it up with a "Lucky Phone Number" contest, avowedly eager to "rock this market like it's never been rocked before."

Disregarding the welter of stations across Denver's dial, Mr. Burden became convinced his formula possessed "great staying power," noting KMYR's improved rating position within a mere 60 days. A few months ago he kicked off a brand new promotion barrage in connection with a change in call to KICN.

Mr. Burden invaded the Pacific Northwest earlier this year, purchasing KVAN Vancouver, Wash. (Portland, Ore.), from Sheldon F. Sackett for \$580,000. True to form, he immediately changed the call to KISN after FCC approval (BROADCASTING, April 20) and claims a better audience share for the facility.

Head Hunter • Spotting future musical trends and air talent have become twin stocks in trade with The Star Stations under Mr. Burden, who constantly scours other markets for capable performers. He also surrounds himself with efficient executive help, as witness the recent appointment of Bill Stewart (formerly with the Storz and McLendon stations) as vice president and assistant to the president. Other management members ("dynamic men for dynamic radio") include Steve Shepard, KOIL; Charles Vais, KISN, and Charles (Chic) Crabtree with KICN.

When he isn't traveling, Mr. Burden attends meetings of the local Optimist Club and chamber of commerce and also is board chairman of the World Wide Film Club (which offers film as a premium). He married the former Dorothy Downing of Pocatello and they have three daughters, Wendy Lea 10, Theresa Lynn 7, and Patricia Marie 4 months. He likes to go fishing occasionally.

Of him an associate recently remarked: "Burden should own stock in the airlines because he is constantly on the go, checking his properties and looking for new cities to 'light on.'"