

EARLYBIRDS OF MODERN RADIO

➤ A decade ago, three groups made headlines with their music-and-news ideas. Where do McLendon, Bartell and Storz stand today? Has their 'formula' changed?

Less than 10 years ago, when the future of radio was gravely in doubt, there appeared on the horizon a handful of innovators—broadcasters who made headlines with their ideas about “formula” operations, who charted courses toward rating dominance that shook the very foundations of the radio industry. Of this small band of revolutionaries, Gordon McLendon, Todd Storz and the Bartell brothers—Jerry, Lee and Mel—were unmistakably the giants, and they became, almost within months, the fathers of modern radio.

Since the early days of their legend-making exploits, the so-called radio image has undergone countless metamorphoses. Changing formats have become almost daily experiences. Community image has become an industry commonplace. Other broadcasters—the disciples, the Johnny-come-latelys—have become headline-makers themselves, both in and out of the trade. And as often happens when inventions take on wildfire proportion, the inventors get swallowed up in the noise. The Mc-

Lendon, Storz and Bartell operations today may no longer be news—as one rep puts it—but looking in on them from time to time is incumbent upon an industry owing them so much.

SPONSOR has done just that. What have we learned?

1. Their basic concepts (music-and-news, the community image) are not substantially changed. They've stood by their guns, so to speak—differing in market-by-market approach, less formula-rigid and more community-integrated, more refined, more sophisticated, but realizing the fruits of their original designs.

2. Both commercially and rating-wise, they remain on top of the heap, the majority of their stations either No. 1 or No. 2 in their respective markets.

The McLendon operation, which practically dominated industry discussion back in 1953-54, was in transition toward its current thesis, or formula, even while in transition from traditional radio technique itself. In 1953, KLIF in Dallas (par-

ent station of the group) burst into national prominence with its formula of music and news plus razzle-dazzle promotion. It was the first radio station in America to stage a \$50,000 treasure hunt in which the \$50,000 was found. It originated a copyrighted “Rear Window” game through which the station was able to put KLIF stickers on the rear windows of more than 50,000 Dallas automobiles. It brought the flagpole sitter back to prominence, staged a world-record-breaking marathon airplane flight in which KLIF pilots stayed aloft 50 days and nights, created the “Star of Anakie” contest, in which the world's second largest star sapphire—437 carats—was given away to a “lucky” housewife to wear for one week at Christmas time. The insurance on the jewel alone, it was reported at the time, cost KLIF some \$3000 for the week. But through such flamboyant promotion, KLIF became the highest rated metropolitan radio station in the country.

In the midst of this dizzying for-

Modern radio tenets: localizing of news, editorializing, creating image out of sound



LESS FLAMBOYANT and formula-rigid than in the early days of 'modern radio,' the McLendon, Storz and Bartell operations today stress active competition with community newspapers, gear their stations' 'sound' to individual markets, avoid 'platitudinous concepts,' run gamut in music types