

tune, however, the possibility that "our leadership might rest on shifting sand" as McLendon himself has noted—became an urgent consideration.

"The formula was hardly a secret in a few months," he told an RTES meeting last year. "What was to prevent imitation? What would happen when the public was surfeited with stunts and ballyhoo and giveaways and the frill of promotion? What happened when all the music and news stations sounded the same—pop music with disc jockeys and scores of gimmicky promotions?"

"We thought we had the answer—and we did. While we made the most of giveaways and other flashy promotions, KLIF earlier decided that there was another type of promotion that would endure, was largely not copyable, and represented a concept that most competitors would

not figure out. The concept was that promotion by means of giveaways or stunts was merely one way of bringing excitement and vivacity to a radio station—and that news, properly done, could lend the same sort of sparkle. Colorful coverage of a continuing news story could produce more stimulation among listeners than the biggest contest or stunts."

As imitators of the original KLIF razzle-dazzle sprang up across the nation, KLIF proceeded with its new "secret" formula. And while giveaways and other spectacular radio gimmicks became banal, the McLendon operation continued to thrive—its real promotional foundation resting firmly upon news; upon on-the-spot mobile news, a fleet of mobile reporters, more than 12,000 remote news broadcasts a year (nearly two every hour).

Other ingredients helped account

for the continuing success:

1. Active competition with Dallas's newspapers.
2. Localization of most of the news stories.
3. Editorializing constantly—and hard.
4. Using the news department for public service purposes—not, says McLendon, for profit.

All in all, the formula was, and is: music plus news, and news, and news.

"More and more," McLendon sums up. "independent radio will abandon the sham and the scream, the fever and the frantic, the jarring and juvenile, the hoopla and the hot-rod, to turn the tripod of history around again, and foursquare, our great antagonist—the newspaper."

But while the news philosophy underscores all the McLendon operations, the "sound" differs from market to market. KABL in San Francisco, for example, has a sound not only different from the McLendon Texas stations', but one new to the San Francisco market, romancing it, so to speak. Or, as one New York rep describes it, "a WPAT with hizazz."

The Bartell Family Radio group relies less heavily on the early-day formula concept, too.

"During the incipient and formative stages of modern radio," says Lee Bartell, executive vice president and managing director of the group, "the concept itself was sufficient to project a station into a prominent position. In most markets today this is no longer possible. Each market must be regarded as unique and individual, and a variant must be tailored which will satisfy the larger needs of the community. This requires not only the determination of a definitive concept, but its implementation on a constant and continuing basis."

It is no longer adequate to program on a "formula" or a "top 40" or a "popular music" basis, the Bartells maintain. They feel that successes of the past, which may have been based on these "platitudinous concepts," no longer provide guideposts for future accomplishments.

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These 5 broadcasters were headline-makers



'FORMULA' operation for independent radio stations was national news when these men broke from network tradition. Top row (l-r), Todd Storz; Gordon McLendon; Below (l-r), Lee Bartell, Jerry Bartell and Mel Bartell, the three brothers heading the Bartell Family Radio group