

# What makes an advertiser buy radio?

- Radio advertisers don't buy time—they buy listeners. Thus the key to sales success is smart programming
- In this exclusive SPONSOR article, a radio station management consultant reveals some programming secrets

**By Richard P. Doherty**

**T**oday, more than ever before, radio broadcasters need to take a long, objective look at their product (i.e., programming) in relation to the audience being served.

Sponsors don't buy time, they buy listeners. The burning question is "How does a station get a full competitive share of its market's listeners?"

In market after market, some smart operator turns to formula programming of the top 40's, top 50's, etc. However good or bad the individual formula, the station adheres religiously to the "top records of the week." For the past two or three years, this has meant serving out big chunks of rock and roll because these tunes dominated the weekly hit parade.

So startling were the audience results of these hit tune stations, that their competitors became panicky. "Fight fire with fire" seemed the only

way to meet the challenge. In a matter of months, virtually every station—in given markets—became a juke box grinding out, and regrinding out, the top hits of the day. Network affiliations seemed to become a burden.

What is often overlooked is the fact that Storz, Plough, Bartell, Kamin, Tele Broadcasters, and similar groups make a tremendous impact in markets not just because they broadcast "formula hit parade and news" programs but because they are highly skillful station operators. Unfortunately many naive broadcasters adopt the program technique of these groups without the management, promotional and sales skill which backs it up.

Broadcasting never was, and never will be, an automatic process of attracting listeners and sponsor dollars.

I'm not taking issue with pop tune stations or even the formula stations. For many years, the WNEW's,

WIND's, WHDH's, etc., have been among the best programmed stations in the nation and they have been devotees of pop tunes and music. They have been industry leaders in modernized radio.

Neither is this article a preacher for network radio. The candid fact is that, for more than a decade, many successful radio stations have been independents.

The whole focal attention of this article is wrapped up in the question being asked by virtually all broadcasters, "Is an 'independent top hit parade station' the one basic mode of broadcasting which assures a solid competitive position?"

The obvious answer is "No."

The formula for successful broadcasting is "better management."

A radio station acquires listeners only from its programs. Smart and alert management is always busy figuring out the best program arrangement to assure that the station will have a hold competitively significant share of the market's audience.

In some instances, the independent top hit parade station will run well ahead of the pack because that station's management has skill and knows how to serve the listener best.

In other instances, a whole flock of stations will merely divide up the market audience because they (the stations) are all doing the same thing and with about equal skill—good or bad. In such markets, the 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., ratings shift from rating period to rating period because of the neck and neck race among virtually identical programming services.

In still other markets, the sole substantial and often No. 1 station is the network affiliate which skillfully blends network programs with top quality segments of local programming.

The American radio audience is large and massive. No single fashion will ever suit this entire audience. It is axiomatic that each station can thrive only when it serves a chosen segment of this audience and does a better program job than its competitors for this audience market.

Hence, if a station decides to enter



*Richard P. Doherty (left) has worked with many broadcasters—from those who rock 'em and roll 'em to those who still lean heavily on the radio format of the 1940's. Doherty is convinced that a substantial percentage of station operators are confused and even frustrated by the upsurge of "formula 40" stations.*

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