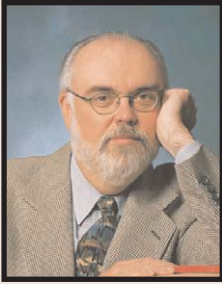


GUERRILLA RADIO

By Alex DeMers



The “hit the streets” promotional attitude that is so essential for successful Alternative stations finds its roots in the nearly two-decade old concept known as Guerrilla Marketing. Ever since author Jay Conrad Levinson coined the term, the guerrilla concept has become an integral

part of the marketing plan for nearly every radio station in the country. However, guerrilla marketing tactics are especially important weapons for Alternative radio as well as those other formats targeting the younger end of the demographic spectrum. Now, with smaller staffs and tighter budgets, the need for innovative and cost effective marketing has never been greater.

According to Levinson, “The soul and essence of guerrilla marketing remain, as always, achieving conventional goals such as profit and joy, with unconventional methods, such as investing energy instead of money.” What could be more Alternative than “achieving conventional goals...with unconventional methods?” Guerrilla marketing can help the bottom line but it also can inspire your staff and help you build a passionate, winning team.

A key to developing a winning strategy is to involve your staff in developing the station’s guerrilla marketing plan. This process should not necessarily be limited to staffers from Promotions and Programming. Who in your station or cluster is on the street, meeting dozens of people every week and constantly persuading them to invest in your product? That’s right – your Sales team can provide an interesting dimension to the brainstorming process as you create ideas to sell your station to your listeners.

From the basics to the big buzz, consider some of these methods for marketing your radio station creatively and effectively:

“Buying” airtime on your own station – Was that cute sweepster with the audio from “insert flavor of the week artist here” an effective piece of marketing or just filler? Think about the inventory you have to market your station more effectively to the listeners you already have. Take the time to build a real campaign, write creative copy and use your airwaves to paint a picture. Nothing sells radio better than radio!

Stunts – Many a morning show has stimulated interest with a key stunt – whether scary, edgy, funny or all of the above – and they can help brand the whole station as fun and irreverent...certainly not “run of the mill” radio. What can your station do that is cheap, timely and outrageous while still being legal? What will get people talking about “those whackjobs” at YOUR station?

Public Service – Whether it’s a one-time event or a recurring campaign, this is an area where your station can get the credit for doing something good while reaping the residual benefits of additional publicity. Blood Drives, Radiothons for local charities, celebrity golf tournaments that benefit local agencies, even shows of patriotism (carefully branded with your station’s particular attitude) are all valid ways of getting deserved attention from other media and the public.

Cable TV – You don’t have to be a cadaver like Don Imus to put your radio show on the tube. Work with your local cable operator and see if “public access” can include your morning show or an in-studio cam at certain points throughout the day. Second best – put a webcam in the studio and feature selected dayparts or events on your website.

Hitting the streets – Whether you call them interns, volunteers or just station fans, taking people power and turning it to your advantage can be a great way to make an impression at a big event. Whether it’s the investment of tee shirts, stickers, buttons etc., people will become walking billboards for you if they get the billboard for free. We’ve had stations make a huge impression at street fairs simply by showing up with enough balloons to give every vendor a bunch to tie to their booth – and what parent can resist a free balloon for their toddler?

But don’t limit yourself to conventional street warfare. Years ago, we launched The End (KKND) in New Orleans. The station hired street people who wore placards proclaiming, “The End is Here” for a week before unveiling the rest of the message “At 106.7 FM.” This generated great cross-media coverage for the launch.

Cross-promotion with clients – They have a store, you have a station. You talk about them on your air, they can play you in the showroom, hang your banners, distribute literature etc. Too often, sales promotions are not developed into “win-wins” for both the client and the station. You are going to effect more people by being highly visible to the passers-by at that car remote in addition to drawing traffic for your client.

Visibility – Banner hangers are the unsung infantry of guerrilla marketing warfare...as are the folks who hand out bumper stickers, post flyers with your call letters on them at dorms and laundromats, etc. But don't neglect the fact that every time a member of your station's team leaves the building, there is marketing potential. When the GSM is playing golf this weekend is he wearing your logo on his golf shirt or cap? When the GM takes an important client out to lunch, does he sign the check with a WXXX pen that he leaves at the table? Did you leave behind a stack of logoed coasters along with that nice tip the last time you took one of your jocks out for a beer?

Free Food – Whether it's your morning show delivering coffee and donuts to an office or putting together a cookout in the parking lot of a large factory, everyone there will thank you for the food. Just make sure you let them experience your product (at least bring a boom box, will ya?) and hand out some schwag.

Mata Hari Media – You're at a bar. The attractive person next to you orders an unusual drink and strikes up a conversation. The drink arrives. She savors it. You're intrigued and order one of the same. Having completed her "mission" (getting YOU to pay for a sample of her client's brand of alcohol) your bar mate excuses herself and moves on to another target.

The next time a cute couple is posing in front of a tourist attraction and the guy comes over to ask you to snap their picture with his neat new digital camera, the odds are pretty good that you and he will end up having a nice chat about the camera – and he will have done the job that the folks at Canon have paid him to do. The radio version of this? I know a young PD who used to spend weekends walking into electronics stores and tuning in his radio station to "test" a component...or two...or ten!

E-mail not Spam – Sure your station has an e-mail database. Is it effective? Has it been cleaned for dupes and updated? What messages are you sending out to your loyal listener fan base? Are there really any benefits for the listener? When your target goes to their in-box is your message going to be deleted as spam or is it going to be read?

The creative end of marketing via e-mail is terribly overlooked at the station level. You only have one chance to get your message noticed, yet most stations put little thought into the one thing nearly everyone who receives your e-mail will most certainly see – the SUBJECT line. Consider these five recent e-mail messages from real stations to real loyal listener databases and see which one grabs your attention –

*Win KXXX Box tickets and more
Cancun and WXXX
FORE!!
Springfest is Saturday! Plus pre-sale for Staind
600-Pound Vibrators For All My Friends!*

Our guess is that most of you would at least find the e-mail for the Harley promotion (yes, that's the 600-pound vibrator) at least memorable.

Working the Web – Remember the buzz on the "Blair Witch Project?" An amazing marketing phenomenon, fueled by the web and, as it turns out, directed and managed by the film's distributor (not the spontaneous phenomenon many thought). Nowadays, more film distributors, TV producers and musicians are manufacturing their own "fan" sites and chat rooms to generate buzz.

When Showtime was in the launch phase of their hit series "Queer As Folk," one of the producers typed the show's name into Google and was astounded to find hundreds of discussion and fan websites popping up in anticipation of the program. He reached out to the webmasters of each of the websites and invited them to post a "Countdown Ticker" on their sites. The ticker branded the program with the show logo, pictures of two stars and a live countdown to the show's debut. 650 websites took him up on his offer and posted the ticker at no cost to the producers.

How are you using your website? Do your listeners have a "chat" area where they can post comments? Can you recruit some of your more rabid P1s to host web discussions about music...or your morning show? Anything that keeps them interacting with your brand is to your benefit.

Alternative Media – Did you know that there is a company selling advertising campaigns to Hollywood studios for their new blockbuster movies using...Fortune Cookies? They have a network of 5000 Chinese restaurants in markets like New York, Los Angeles, Boston and Philadelphia and they distribute 7 Million fortune cookies weekly – with the fortune on the front and the movie spiel on the back.

Does it work? Consider – 96% of people eating at a Chinese restaurant read their fortune and a quarter of them see a new movie within the first two weeks of its release – this group is 36% more likely to sample a new movie than the average moviegoer. Where else can YOU get your message in front of your listeners?

Think BIG – Guerrilla marketing does not necessarily mean "free" marketing though it is usually quite cost-effective. In terms of sheer scale (and audacity) consider the story of Half.com. You may recall the stunt where they convinced the people of tiny Halfway, Oregon to rename the municipality after the company. In terms of ROI consider that the initial investment of \$110,000 generated more than \$4,000,000 in raw publicity, launched the dotcom into the top ten of Internet shopping sites and put the company's name on everyone's lips. Consider also that, within three weeks of the stunt, eBay contacted the company to discuss acquisition. Half became part of eBay six months and \$300,000,000 later (yes, it was THOSE days but still an amazing achievement).

When thinking "cheap," keep scale in mind. For example, if you could show that your \$10,000 idea could generate the effect of a \$300,000 TV campaign, you might be able to get the seed money to launch YOUR big idea. With enough imagination, commitment, teamwork and, yes, good luck – you may be able to take your guerrilla marketing ideas and build them into GORILLA sized success stories.