



Program The Seller

Tactics to bring peace to sales and programming

By Alex Demers

So you're a program director, sitting at your desk and trying to make sense of the fall book, brainstorming a weekend promo idea, monitoring the competition, and eating your lunch, when a salesperson pops her head in your door. "Hey, quick question, are you open to giving away tickets to (local theatre production here)?" Distracted, you say, "I don't know. Sure." The next thing you know, the client is expecting 25 promos, 50 giveaways and an interview with the star of the show in morning drive. How did things go so terribly wrong?

Salespeople want to please the client so they can pay their mortgage for another month. Programmers want to maintain a focused on-air sound so they can cling to their ratings for one more book. Alex DeMers has some easy suggestions to bring a détente to the sales/programming battle. Give it a read, then go find your sales manager and give her a hug.

Sell Yourself

Most program directors and operations managers now find themselves handling multiple responsibilities at several stations within a cluster. That workload doesn't mean that one can afford to relinquish his or her responsibility to increase station revenue. Below are some concepts to build on in the programming department as you work toward developing the most effective moneymaking team in your cluster.

Know Your Stuff. Do you have a strategic plan? Can you clearly articulate the goals of the radio station, describe the target, map out the tactics, etc.? If you don't know the playbook, it's going to be difficult for the other players to have confidence in you, whether they're in your department or in sales. Understand and know your research and Arbitron. Be able to gauge honestly where you are on the road to success.

Make time for face time. We know you're busy, but any program director who turns down an invitation to attend a sales meeting is missing a great opportunity to develop allies. When attending a sales meeting, come prepared. Be able to focus on an aspect of programming that you want to share with the sales team. Also, be prepared to answer questions about strategy, tactics and why the morning show used "that word" on the air this morning. Be open and responsive. This is your opportunity to communicate, inform and teach.

Tell stories. Reinforce the value of your station by helping the sales department focus on the station's successes. When you're with the salespeople, take the time to talk about what's working – the latest promotion, successful bit, or community service campaign. Encourage them to share more of their clients' successes with you as



well, something great to take back to the staff at your next programming department meeting.

Empathy Scores Points

As competitive as you are, the average salesperson is dealing with more hand-to-hand combat in a day than you are likely to experience in a career.

Listen and compromise. While programmers are certainly under stress, the level of rejection an account executive faces is enormous. (Think *American Idol* with Simon Cowell as the only judge.) So when they come to you with yet another client request, do what you can do to make things work for a real win-win. There are limits, of course, and you must be prepared to fight for product integrity, but learn to choose your battles wisely. Consider both the short-and-long-term effects of any decision, negotiate for a solution, and don't hesitate to ask for return favors.

Be consistent. Nothing drives the sales department crazier than a patchwork of ever-changing guidelines from the programming department. Whether this involves special programming, sponsor packaging, endorsements, promo inventory, etc., set a template and do your best to stick to it. One way to get cooperation and buy-in from the sales department on these issues is to develop these policies jointly whenever possible.

The competition's out there, not in here. The points above only work if you operate from the mind-set that "we are all on the same side." Tales of battles between stations' programming and sales departments are legion, and such squabbles have never had the potential to cost operations more in terms of wasted time and lost revenue opportunities than in today's cluster. Do your best to keep the facts straight internally, squelch rumors and focus on being the best you can be. Sure, there will be conflicts, but keep the sibling rivalries inside the building and off the streets.



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