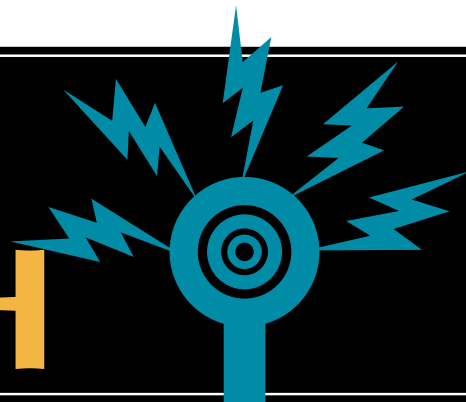


DEMERS DISPATCH



A PUBLICATION OF DEMERS PROGRAMMING MEDIA CONSULTANTS

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Everyday Passion vs. Passion Every Day

With ever-increasing responsibilities at nearly every level, many of the folks we know in the radio biz find themselves managing up, managing down and doing anything to keep from going sideways. The result is often a "path of least resistance" strategy toward product development. In order to stay out of harm's way, maintaining the status quo is sometimes mistaken for being on the road to success.

It's not that broadcasters don't care about their job, their department, their station – they do! ... just not enough to rock the boat. Those that still remember the "every station for itself" days of competition know that necessity was often the mother of invention – if you wanted to win, you needed to take risks. As the game has moved into a cluster mentality, passion for individual stations sometimes takes a backseat to so-called "cluster love," forcing a single station into a supportive position to maintain overall stability.

The result is that the creative forces at individual stations are often concentrated on building a product whose main attribute is consistency. It's not a great station; it's not a bad station. As long as the on-air product stays between the lines, nobody gets fired...at least this week. Has your operation become a victim of this "everyday passion," where good enough gets you through to the next day? Where consistency, as opposed to greatness, is your holy grail?

Truth is, when you're not going forward, you're slipping back. It takes more than consistency to

drive your product to the proverbial next level – it takes vision, guts, debate and a deep belief in the ability of the team to generate a compelling product every day in order to go from good to great.

Has your operation become a victim of this "everyday passion" – where good enough gets you through to the next day?

Beware the trap of believing that being a *well-researched* product is the goal when being a *well-thought-out* product is the real answer. If your research project comes back giving your station a "B" report card – the basics are all covered, but there are few brand attributes beyond the successful focus of the station's music position – ignore the temptation to accept that result as victory. If you simply view being "on course" as your goal, you will then be accepting the math that makes for bland radio – achieving the status quo(ient).

This "just-don't-make-any-mistakes" approach is somewhat hypocritical since we expect listeners, who have no real vested interest in our individual stations, to develop a sense of passion about our product. We expect commitment (to the point of remembering every minute they spent listening to our station and then writing it down), even though all we've done is the programming equivalent of dotting the "i's" crossing the "t's" and reconciling the daily music log. If we don't care passionately about our product, we cannot expect to develop a loyal following of listeners who care passionately about, what to them is, a simple pastime.

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THOUGHT STARTERS

CHECKLIST

STATION PREP

In order to produce your station every day, to be memorable, entertaining and thought provoking you need to have methods for getting "in-tune" with your listeners. It's common for Morning Shows to prep for each day's program. We find that it can be very useful to go through a similar "Station Prep" exercise – asking yourself some important questions every day. The following thought-starters are grouped according to some general areas we believe will be helpful to you as you get on the road to creating a better listening experience for your audience.

ENVIRONMENT

- How will today's weather affect the listeners? Is it generally seasonable or unseasonable? Is it hot, cold, rainy, snowy, stormy or worse?
- If they're on the road, how will local traffic patterns affect their mood? Will they encounter any unusual hassles today?
- What are the listeners doing today? Are they busy at work or loafing around the house? Is it a day for family activities, entertaining friends at home or going out on the town?
- Is today routine or somehow special in the listeners' minds? What makes today unique?

ENTERTAINMENT

- What sporting events and/or results have significance today?
- What's going on in the world of Music (the type most listeners associate with the radio station)? Who are the hot artists and/or songs at the moment? What are the big tours coming through the area soon? How is the station involved?
- What's happening in TV/Cable, Film (Hollywood and Home Video), Publishing (Magazines, Newspapers, Books), Gaming and Internet entertainment?
- What gossip (showbiz or otherwise) are the listeners interested in today? What are the true water cooler topics out there in the real world?

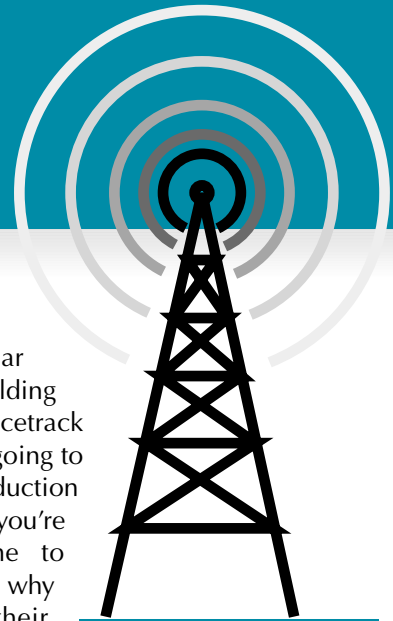
EVENTS

- Is there any historical, political or religious significance to this day?
- Are there any events of local or regional significance that carry special meaning for the listeners going on now or on the horizon?
- What's in the news today? Do any of these stories significantly impact the listeners? What are the why, how and when of these external events?
- What unique station activity is taking place today? How do the listeners benefit by taking part in this event?

EMOTIONS

- Has anything hit the listeners collective hot button recently, giving them particularly strong feelings one way or another?
- What is my assessment of the general mood of the country? Is the region/community in sync with that emotion or involved in a local issue that affects them differently?
- Is there anything the station could do today to make the listeners feel better about themselves or their community?
- What's one thing we could share with the listeners that would be a genuine surprise?
- What will make the listeners feel the need to be emotionally connected to the station today? What will make them come back for more tomorrow?

CHECK, *Please!*



Can you imagine a movie like *Star Wars* without a script? Did those Harry Potter books make it to stores without any editing? Ever hear of the Stones launching a world tour without rehearsing? Do you think Tony Soprano nails it in one take?

Of course not.

Why not? Because the creative minds behind these entertainments want it to look great. And sound great. And come off just the way they envisioned it, before it reaches you, the audience.

Why then doesn't radio take a cue from the rest of the entertainment industry and make sure their performers get it right *before* it goes out over the airways?

Most programmers have some form of airchecking system in place with their airstaff. A good PD knows the importance of hearing how the announcers are presenting the station. The problem is, the PD is hearing the finished product almost always after it has already been broadcast. So, if there is an issue with the performance, it's too late to correct it.

How could it be otherwise? Surprisingly, the answer is one of the often-cited "evils" of consolidation – Voice Tracking! The very tool companies have implemented to reduce programming payroll and turn talent into multi-taskers can actually aid in making your station's airshifts sound better.

Consider the potential: most PDs we know would consider Weekend jocks among the usual suspects for tossing off poorly executed breaks. Talent with only occasional shifts can easily get off course. Whatever the reasons, the quality of part-time airstaff at many stations often comes under fire for "I can't believe I heard that" performances.

Sure, PDs can review airchecks and correct mistakes after the fact. But then the audience has already been subjected to a performance you'd like to have back. What if, instead of reviewing shifts with jocks *after* their shows had aired, the enlightened PD was to PRE-check those shows? Obvious mistakes could be corrected on the spot; ill-conceived comments re-recorded immediately and misinterpretations of the station's positioning eliminated.

Now consider Night jocks, even Midday announcers, that wear several hats in your building and who already voicetrack their shows. If they're going to devote time in the production studio anyway, and if you're going to devote time to reviewing their work, why not Pre-Check their presentations instead of reviewing them?

Think of the possibilities...you can't get a do over for bad breaks that have already happened, but you can turn back time and modify the trivia question that was worded awkwardly. Or re-record a specific break that would have otherwise lacked the sponsor mention. Or eliminate the mispronunciation of the name of the hot new band. Breaks with no call letters or those with improper image usage would, at least theoretically, never hit the air.

Your station might sound...perfect. Too perfect. Which is why Pre-Checking isn't a viable option for every element of the station – or for every jock on your roster. It would be out of the question for any listener interaction-driven dayparts (mornings, most obviously) to pre-record their work to be screened by a PD before airing.

But Pre-Checking does give the PD a tool to help a developing talent get immediate feedback on their performance with less risk for the radio station. For every PD who's gone home at night fuming after a frustrating airchecking experience or having just heard a "blown break," consider how many of those risks might be eliminated by Pre-Checking your talent. Whether used as a tool for rehearsal, or the pre-recording of actual breaks to be used on the air, Pre-Checking can be a useful tool to add to your Programming arsenal.

*"What if, instead of reviewing shifts with jocks *after* their shows had aired, the enlightened PD was to PRE-check those shows?"*

Everyday Passion vs. Passion Every Day

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What would happen if your station really approached each moment as a unique opportunity for you to entertain, inform, charm, challenge and engage your listeners in ways that no other media outlet can? What would happen if you made a commitment to "produce" your station every day – much as one would "produce" a theatrical performance? With the abundance of manufactured reality gaining attention on TV, surely radio's authentic reality has a great chance to provide a memorable entertainment experience – if we commit passionately to the product every day.

Producing your radio station every day takes commitment from the station's Programming leadership. It also places a great deal of individual responsibility on the members of your airstaff and the support team handling Imaging, Promotions and Marketing. Although these are times of lean budgets and multi-tasking, management must be committed to developing a work environment that allows some "think time" to look ahead through the quarter, plan for the coming month, focus on the week at hand and then, finally, zero in on the single day to be produced.

Use this time to think like a listener. Anticipate their needs far enough in advance in order to be able to entertain them in memorable ways. This process can begin simply by asking yourself the right questions. We've provided a suggested list of "thought starters" to get this process going at your station (see page 2). The bottom line is to determine what you and your station

will leave your listeners with on any given day that is entertaining, unique, memorable and, honestly, worthy of their time and attention.

We've noted before in these pages that we are now in an "attention economy," where a consumer's time and interest is more valuable than almost anything. When listeners invest their time with your radio station, make sure they get a good return on that investment or they'll surely take their ass(ets) somewhere else.

So, how can we, as your programming consultants, help you produce your station every day? Quite simply, we need to become your programming partner. Taking the information at hand, reviewing the competitive environment and offering our take on how best to develop a winning position is just the beginning. A true consulting partnership requires that we do *more* than meet your expectations of what an outside advisor can provide you and your station.

We believe that it is our role as your advisors to continually present you with *more* new ideas, *more* fresh angles, and more unique challenges to energize your internal creative process. If we're not talking to you, if we're not challenging you, if we're not *irritating* you, then we're not helping you produce the best, most memorable listener experience you and your station are capable of.

When You're Ready For More... Call DeMers Programming!



DEMERS DISPATCH

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