



DeMers Programming

TOOLBOX: A to Zs

A-Z VARIETIES

A-Zs are really a modified form of a basic programming concept: the countdown. In an A-Z, the premise is to play a series of songs in *alphabetical* order. The most common tactics are to program a format A-Z, playing all the songs in your library, or an artist A-Z, playing all the songs from one particular artist.

Format A-Zs may last several days, and countdowns longer than a week are relatively common. The strategy behind a format A-Z is to display your station's musical depth. Classic based stations often use A-Zs to showcase their "huge" music libraries, while current based stations can use A-Zs as special events to repackage their music and freshen their scheduled song histories.

An artist A-Z is often tied into a specific event, like a concert. This A-Z feature can last anywhere from just a few hours to an entire weekend, depending on which band is featured, and how much of their music you include. Several stations have had success with a "Best Of [Artist] A-Z," which gave them the freedom to play only the most popular tracks from the musician's career.

Other, less common variations include concert A-Zs, where you feature the music of several acts on the same tour visiting your area (Ozzfest, etc), USA-Zs, which feature only American artists, and backwards A-Zs (or Z to As).

PROMOTION

With any type of A-Z, on-air promotion is the key to success. We suggest for a format A-Z, you start to promote your feature several weeks in advance, and continue aggressive promotion through the end of (and in some cases even after) your event. If you are in a head to head market battle, or if you've got a competitor that usually steals your ideas, you should brainstorm ideas with your consultant on the best way to promote your A-Z without giving your competition a heads up.

Program Directors should coach talent on how to *sell* the A-Z and turn it into a station event. A good tactic is to involve your listeners. Record phoners of listeners asking questions, or just talking about, you're A-Z. You can also promote your event by involving listeners in its construction. Set up a form on your website, for instance, where listeners can fill in songs they think should be in you're A-Z. The more ways you can get listeners involved before your event, the more word-of-mouth promotion you'll benefit from.

MUSIC

When it does come down to constructing your A-Z list, your consultant is, as always, available to help you. Make sure you give yourself several weeks lead-time; you won't be able to program an A-Z on just a few days notice. Start by reviewing your music scheduling software and see what songs you already have on hand. If you have access to national airplay data, you should use this information to identify songs you may be missing. You don't need to have everything (particularly if you're doing a "Best Of A-Z"), but you should gather enough music to communicate



Consider a "Back To School" A-Z Weekend this August. As kids go back to school to learn their ABCs, let parents learn the ABCs of music with your special feature.

Set up contests with trivia questions like "Are You Smarter Than An Xth-grader." Ask listeners to call in for back-to-school related prizes such as gift certificates or shopping sprees for kids to get new clothes and school supplies; backpacks filled with all the school essentials, etc.

Your event offers numerous back to school sales opportunities. Once you know how many minutes of music each "letter" will have, you can sell sponsorships for each letter ("We're up to letter T in our A-Z weekend, brought to you by Tony's Tire Shop"). Any clients that want to attract back to school shoppers will have a natural interest in your special weekend. Approach book retailers, department stores, colleges and education centers, sporting goods stores and office supply chains. Plus don't forget about small businesses that usually get a back to school boost like optometrists and dentists!



depth to your listeners. As you review your scheduling software, check to make sure you actually have copies of all the songs you'll need.

SEQUENCE

Once you've gathered all the music you want, and entered the extra songs into your music system, you'll need to decide how to sequence your A-Z. We suggest you order the feature alphabetically by title. By doing so in a format A-Z, you'll be able to mix up artists and showcase a good sense of variety. In some cases, stations have tried other sequencing tactics. The most popular alternative to 'by title' is probably 'by artist.' In most cases, this sequence doesn't project the same sense of variety; instead it is more similar to the block party tactic. One station we know sorted their songs by the first letter of the title only. In other words, they grouped all the A's together, but then played the group of A's in a non-sequential order. The station's fear was that a listener might catch them "miss" a song if they followed a strict alphabetical order. We think this concern is overblown, and the essence of the A-Z tactic was eclipsed. There may always be a handful of listeners who complain about one thing or another, but you shouldn't necessarily sacrifice your programming tactics to accommodate them.

AUTOMATION

Your next challenge is to merge your A-Z schedule with your automation system. If you have non-live dayparts where you intend to run your A-Z, you may have to spend a little extra time coordinating your systems. Since each station setup is unique, we won't go into specific details here, but you should feel free to brainstorm with your consultant ways to overcome the challenges of automation when programming an A-Z.

PRODUCTION

Since your A-Z is a special event, you should use special production. In the past, several stations have dug up Sesame Street audio to identify letters of the alphabet. We found a CD collection of Sesame Street songs called "[Sing The Alphabet](#)" (1996 – SONY). Another audio option is to record area schoolteachers introducing each new letter ("This is John Smith, and English teacher from Buckhead Elementary. You're listening to the letter 'A.' On WXXX, 'A' stands for songs like 'Addicted To Love,' 'All My Love,' and 'After Midnight'). You can also try a tongue-in-cheek approach and create promos sponsored by each letter of the alphabet ("This hour of music on WXXX is brought to you by the letter G..."). Allow enough lead-time so that you can use your station voice to record these sweepers.

CONTESTS

You can reinforce your A-Z theme with giveaways. For instance, trigger listeners to call in for prizes whenever you start to play songs from a new letter. Then give away complete artists' CD catalogues, a jukebox filled with discs or iPods loaded with tunes from your format to reinforce your music depth image. Alternately, work with a video store to award a month of free video rentals so one lucky listener can watch all their favorite movies from A-Z. Or, give away a new gaming system and an A-Z library of games. You can effectively package whatever prizes are at your disposal, as long as you do so in a way that is consistent with your A-Z music image.

When should you run an A-Z?

- ✓ **Beginning or end of a book**
- ✓ **A format competitor is signing on**
- ✓ **You have turnover in a major personality daypart and want to take the focus off that daypart**
- ✓ **You're promoting variety in your marketing or on-air imaging**