

Why do they listen?

We look at why people choose to listen to the radio over their own music collection?

So ***why do people listen to the radio?*** One of the most important things about understanding and making radio is *understanding what your customer wants*. To most stations your prime customer is the listener, in commercial radio there are two customers; the listener and the advertiser. Depending how *service* orientated the station is, it may even consider themselves to have three customers, the listener, the advertiser and themselves. But most station consider there to be two, the listeners and advertisers.

Essentially in commercial radio you need to deliver to part of your customer base *the advertisers* as many of the other type of the customer, *the listener*, they want, for as long as possible.

So whilst a local commercial pop station will usually be aiming for non-professional 18-39 yr olds with a female skew, Adult or Classic FM will be aiming for a 35+ semi-professional male/female equal split. The reasoning is not that these different groups have different music tastes, but the advertisers seek different targets. And those targets have different lifestyle needs, pressures and spending patterns.

This is similar to radio network XYZ; each station has target criteria as set by the networks Governors who determine target and format that each station should aim for. So, Young XYZ FM will be aiming for 16-29 yr old, equal male/female split. You can probably work out the other categories.

This is not to say that people outside these categories should not listen, but you shouldn't aim at those types of people. Interesting to note that the main reason they do listen is because they either aspire to be included in that category (wish they were younger than they are) or can't get what they want from the stations aimed at them. For example, Adult XYZ FM may have a target of 30-50 yr olds but still has a large slice of 18-29 yr olds because no other station offers them the footy coverage they desire. It may also have a large following from older listeners who want to still feel youthful.

There are also sub-categories that stations will also aim for, most notably local commercial stations that aim at 13-18 yr olds. The reason is that in a family situation, most decisions about what to listen to are made by the children in that category. So, on the school run in the morning, the kids get into the car and put on Young XYZ FM and hey presto, the parent gets to listen to all the adverts aimed at their demo.

So we've determined who your listener is, all dependent of target, now we need to work out why the listen. *And the answer to that depends on the time and circumstances they listen to the radio.*

Most radio listening is done *in the morning* - and *people tend to want information and entertainment in that order*. They want, what's been called the "*normality check*" which is the news and sport - to check the world hasn't blown up. They want the "*get to work check*", which is weather, travel, and time info. And during this they want other useful information and to be entertained. Note, they don't want to stop what they're doing to focus on the radio, so they want things in bite-size easy to digest lumps.

Once they've got to work, depending on where they're working, *they'll tend to want the radio on to keep from being bored*, whether it's working in a factory, driving a taxi, in a

showroom, office or medical ward. Deliver less information, but more entertainment, all the while, nothing that is going to require concentration.

So when they leave work, they'll require homebound traffic reports, extra news to tell them what's happened during the day whilst they've been away, perhaps some entertainment news such as TV or cinema guides to tell them what they could do or see tonight. Make sure you pick them up and make themselves feel good about living.

And then into the evening and night-time, they require less information, and have more time and desire to concentrate on the radio, therefore countdowns or requests & dedication shows and the like that require lots of user inter-activity can take place. If you can get people to listen to the radio as they go to bed, good chance that's the station that they'll listen to when they wake up the next morning.

So we can understand the bit about information giving, *but why do listeners have a preference in music-radio to be entertained?*

The answer is in 'ease-of-use'. One of the current buzzword is lean-back technology, which is what radio is. You press a button; find the desired station, and you're done. You can listen to radio all day and not have to do anything else, and you'll hopefully get all the information and entertainment you need according to your taste.

Of course there are opportunities to participate and people do. But the first rule of radio you need to be aware of is that just because no-one phones, it doesn't mean no-one's listening - it just means they are busy doing other things and have no incentive or need to call. Even the big cash giveaways will only attract a small portion of your audience, the loyal actives. Some analysts say that as few as 1 in 800 listeners actually call in to the station to participate or seek information.

The other reason people listen for entertainment is the collective experience of 'water cooler talk'. This is, if everyone else in your peer group listens to a station you tend to, so you can chat about it in the classroom, pub or lunch room or whatever the next time you meet. "Did you hear that thing on the B'fast show this morning? He was so funny when he..."

Why do stations hook you the listener all the time by telling you ahead when they are going to play a new song, conduct a competition or interview a big star? Not so you know, you're already listening, it's so that you can tell your friends about it. It creates *water cooler talk*. *Water cooler talk* is an important ingredient that every station needs to generate. Why? Because it generates more time spent listening and increases your Cume and station loyalty. The station becomes memorable.

It partly explains why people enjoy taking part in competitions, phone-ins and request shows; it's the knowledge that their voice and input to the program is being heard across the stations broadcast area. Phone-ins, in particular, work because people want to express their opinion to the rest of the audience, and they seek the attention of the masses.

But perhaps the biggest reason that people listen to the radio, is because they always have. And the people around them always have. Radio is part and parcel of our life as we know it today, and because of its ease-of-use, we switch the radio on more out of habit when we need a quick-fix of entertainment or info. When you're washing the dishes, doing homework, or driving to visit a relative, the radio goes on because you know it's there and you know it will provide great music and good company, and hopefully provide the information they are interested in.