

"THE PLAN FOR WHEN YOUR STATION EXPIRES (AND HOW TO HAVE A PLAN SO IT DOESN'T)"

There's lots of talk out there about the PPM. There is a lot of talk about the future of radio and the media. The talk continues about renewed consolidation and compression of ratings in markets all across America. And there is the roll out and introduction of the HD radio channels.

Now, with all of this talk, how will each of these things impact the ratings for your individual station and cluster? How can you be the smart one to position yourself correctly for a successful future?

Here's the plan to make sure your station – or your brands – don't expire in the haze of 21st Century technology updates and the new choices listeners have in 2006 and beyond. We will make it a simple plan to follow. You can either take the advice and couple it with your own wisdom about your market and the developing threats to local radio....or let it fall on deaf ears and see which way the wind blows your personal future.

Step one is to begin a new way of thinking about your radio station.

1. To be successful in the future you must be able to identify the important causes and issues for your target audience and – to some extent – the market at large. These causes and issues must be presented to your audience on the air, on your website, and in your marketing.

Note that the "entry fee" to continuing your success is to play the right music, have the best morning show, and make good choices about what you air "between the records." What we are talking about here is related to giving voice and a definable attribute identified with your station and the key issues important to your listeners. It is the next important step for radio right now. The real winners will make this happen; everyone else will wonder what happened.

Step two is to turn your marketing toward relationship and aspirational marketing to key on what people in your market aspire to be and create your radio station's image with the new rule for radio in the 21st Century.

2. The new rule for radio in the 21st Century is Cause + Preference = Dominance.

Listeners have to prefer your music to develop into superstar listeners (P1s). You must make them passionate about your personalities and your lifestyle to brand them as 100% yours.

Step three is to recognize the changes coming to the way radio will be rated in the future and adjust your marketing to brace for the change. Then further your own advantage by being smart with your marketing and creating opportunity geared toward the new systems.

3. It will be more important than ever to build even stronger personal relationships with your P1 listeners, and even P2s, who could develop into "brand cheerleaders" in the future. This can only be done effectively using direct marketing and being smart about the information you have and can get from your important listeners.

Step four is to recognize that the best boost a product can get always comes from consumer talk. Creating hand-to-hand endorsements through the way you direct market and the way you create perceptions about your station are more important now than ever. If you don't have a program to do this, you should begin talking with an expert today about the future of your radio station.

4. Hand-to-hand endorsements protect your radio station from competitive borrowing and strengthen your ratings immediately and over time.

We all know that change is coming. It's here. The only thing about the radio business that is guaranteed is change. In that way, we have an advantage over other media. How you embrace this change is the key to your success when electronic measurement happens in your market. How you create opportunity for your team and how you adjust your direct marketing will be a strong factor in developing and protecting your brand in the future. And the future is a lot closer than you think.