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2007 Radio Roundtable

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Chick

Using your website to get, keep and grow your audience!

Can your station's website attract new listeners?

When looking at a typical radio website, you might reasonably get the impression that a lot of programmers and managers think their station's site is mostly an opportunity to bombard users with "added value" ads or to build a database. Building the station's brand and increasing your audience via your site seems to come as an afterthought if it is there at all. But is the concept of the website as tool to build audiences based on anything but wishful thinking?

Chris Sacca, head of the special initiatives department at Google, recently told a gathering of technology innovators, "At Google, we worry first about creating an application that will work to benefit a user, rather than worrying first about how it's going to make money."

Why did radio follow the exact opposite model? Many stations, concerned with bottom line, focused on making a quick profit or to use their websites to collect a database of listeners—rather than focus on how those listeners might benefit from the site. Stations also became enamored with streaming—listeners in offices with poor reception or out of range could more easily hear the station. Ads on the internet tended to be tacked on, offered as "value added" to loyal station advertisers. And many used interns to maintain their sites as an afterthought.

But stations are beginning to get it right. According to a recent Arbitron/Edison research study, 57 million Americans listened to a streaming station in the past week. That's 21% of the available 12+ population.

Broadcasters are beginning to get the idea that now they're no longer "just" running a radio station, rather, working to develop and market "a brand," and as "content providers." And since most on air personalities and programmers, don't really care whether their audience hears the show over the airwaves or online, advertisers, hungry for more eyes and ears, benefit as well.

1. MYTH or FACT: You can attract new listeners to the radio station from your website.

2. MYTH or FACT: You can make money from the website (even if you are not Ebay or a porn site)

The answers are Fact, and Fact.

ATTRACTING NEW LISTENERS THROUGH YOUR SITE

Why would someone want to visit your station site? (Often it's just to see what the personalities look like.) But it's important to ask: What is it they will get? What can you offer your online visitors that they can't get elsewhere? When you offer something that is unique, and relevant, it can draw in new audiences.

Take a page out of NPR's playbook. Public radio stations began successfully attracting new listeners and viewers to their sites by not only offering podcasts and archived programming, so that listeners can hear the programming when they want to, on their own schedules, but also

by giving "extra portions" of interviews that didn't make it to air. For example, if NPR airs a short, say, five minute interview with an author, but you would like to hear the entire, longer version of the interview that might not have made it to air, now you can download it or listen to the entire complete, unedited, interview online.

What are some of the other ways stations are attracting new listeners through their websites?

Rick Jensen, program director and talk host at News/Talk WDEL in Wilmington, DE stresses the importance of offering something on your site that cannot be gotten elsewhere. "Start by focusing on your station's core competencies. Think back to the days when the big Top 40 station would leave a list of their "pick hits" at local record stores. They were often sponsored—the goal was to get Top 40 record buyers to listen to your station. Then fast-forward to 2007. Ask: 'What is it your station does better than anyone else? How can you market that to non-listeners?'"

Jensen suggests, "Get your website on email lists of influential groups who can benefit from your station and website. Maybe your station is the most reliable for severe weather reports and school closings with unparalleled resources on the air and on the internet. When schools, association and others with large member databases include this information with the message "Listen to... or Go to..." they are not just promoting your station or your website, they are providing service to their members. In return advertisers love being associated with such a benefit and having their message seen by hundreds of thousands of eyeballs in addition to ears throughout the winter storm season."

Clear Channel's News/Talk stations have begun routinely sending their reporters out with cameras to post video or footage for their station's websites as well. At WDEL, reporters are not only sent out with cameras, they produce a daily video newscast, much like any major market TV newscast, on www.wdel.com.

GETTING INTO SEARCH ENGINES

Driving up the number of "hits" on your site is crucial for getting into search engines. That's how Google and the other search engines offer up your station's site in higher placement for someone seeking general information on a story. Cross promoting the website on the station is also important to drive up hits.

But there are other ways to get your station to "pop up" at the top of the search engine listing on a topic.

Eben Brown, a reporter at WFLA in Tampa, helped implement a stronger news image for his station's website, suggests, "Drum up as much news on your own as you can. At www.970wfla.com we use a lot of photo galleries. I'm often the local radio pool reporter for Presidential ▶▶



Valerie Geller

visits, which allows me to get quite close and take stellar photos. I'll post a gallery, especially if he's visiting local sites or posing with local celebrities. Once, the President took a few minutes to give a pep talk to our unlucky football team, and those pictures were quite popular among our web site viewers. We watched the counter rise continually. We left it up for a while and it continued to get a fair amount of attention."

DRIVING THE HIT COUNTER UP - COME SEE THE HALF NAKED LADY

[Animal rights group,] "P.E.T.A. often uses women in bikinis (or less sometimes) to get attention to their demonstrations. I interviewed and shot video of one lady protesting outside a KFC. The radio story was admittedly a bit boring, but we mentioned that video of the bikini-clad twenty-something was available on our web site. The hit counter went through the roof."

Brown also suggests, "put longer versions of killer interviews online, with your anchors directing the listeners to the website to hear it. Or create a text article with selected quotes for your website a few days in advance of airing that interview. It's about giving people more. Post raw news—unedited dramatic video, a gallery of photographs from the destruction caused by a category five hurricane, court documents from high-profile trials—the things you couldn't get on the radio, but that tell the story on their own without the need to be packaged."

Stations still employing substantial news departments are also asking them to do more. Today's radio news department is no longer just a radio news department. Brown says, "It's more taxing to produce for more than one medium and some old dogs need to learn new tricks; often writing and producing news in both print and television styles. It's worth it to invest in the technology and training to implement this."

He warns, on your site, make sure you get credit—"If you use a 'coverage partner's' big logo on your web site, that will tell people they can find the news at your partner's web site and not yours. If you're co-owned with a TV station or newspaper, work with them to form a single online brand of news."

Brown also stresses the importance of relevant, quality and current content: "While the news you post online is ever-changing, it is for a brief period as permanent as a newspaper article. A lackluster, weak or sloppy piece of reporting on the web will stand out for all the wrong reasons."

BIG MARKET STATIONS CAN BETTER SERVE LOCAL NICHE COMMUNITIES

And bring in new listeners. Serving an audience by finding out what they need and want is key. **Tim McAteer**, managing editor for online content at all-news 1010 WINS in New York, says 1010 WINS not only gains measurable new listeners from the internet, they use both the website www.1010wins.com and cell phone Text Alert Network as extensions of the 1010 WINS brand.

"We've also recently increased our hyper-local news coverage, [to reach new, non-radio audiences] and in return we have advertisers who can target their ads to specific boroughs. One example is placing content from 1010 WINS news on local websites, such as the township of Long Island's Rockville Centre." [If you go to: www.ci.rockville-centre.ny.us, then click on the Village Hall photo, you will see a series of hyperlinks (on the right hand side of the page), to local stories from 1010 WINS. People who might be 1010 WINS listeners, but are interested in local stories can easily access the 1010 WINS content, from the local township site, then may turn on the station for more.]

TALK STATIONS - CONTINUING THE TALK ON-LINE

Many News/Talk stations offer entertaining community online chat boards, where listeners can freely continue a conversation off air, but online, about topics or issues they've heard on air with a chance to express their views.

NEVER LOSE A LISTENER!

If your information is old, and not updated regularly, or your site is hard to navigate, or requires too much personal or private information from them, listeners may not return.

DON'T DRIVE PEOPLE AWAY - "PERMISSION MARKETING" IS NEEDED

While radio stations love to collect data bases on listeners to provide to advertisers, take care. The number one complaint about radio websites is that they ask for too much information. If you want the concert tickets or to join the "All Access Club" visitors are asked to give personal information. Many people feel uncomfortable giving their age, zip code, address, sex, marital status or income level on line. Listeners (particularly women 25-54) resent it, believing it affects their privacy and will attract spam. Many, to get the "goodies," simply lie. Or leave. The key to "permission marketing," is to ask for a listener's participation, but not to force them. The goal: To offer a unique and rich enough experience so they come back and visit again, and maybe even turn on their radio for more! ■

DOs & DON'TS FOR YOUR WEBSITE

DO:

- * Get in search engines. (E.g.: the posted photo of the P.E.T.A. 'half naked girl' for example, people will look)
- * Create something new for the web, (e.g: WFLA's photo galleries or video newscasts like WDEL). Post photos and bios of your personalities. Add chat rooms where listeners can express views. Offer any unique content that your audience cannot get elsewhere.
- * Send your reporters and promotional staff out with cameras.
- * Hire a pro to maintain the site, a dedicated webmaster to update and keep your website fresh. (It's worth the investment.)
- * Take a page from the NPR model of giving additional or more content that you cannot get "on air."
- * Create liasons with your local listening communities, (e.g: Tim McAteer's 1010 WINS News Information RSS links off the local individual community websites.)
- * Make listeners want to be on your email list—(school closings etc.) Take what you do best and promote that on the web.
- * Cross promote your website and radio station.

DON'T

- * Make your website hard to navigate. Make it easy for people to find what they want.
- * Bombard your visitor with ads or use the site as a dumping ground for value added spots.
- * Make it about YOU and not the listener.
- * Just use an intern to maintain the site.
- * Make visitors feel invaded by using it as a data collector for personal info.
- * Make it irrelevant or offer nothing new or of value to a listener.

Valerie Geller, president of Geller Media International, is an international broadcast consultant specializing in news, talk, information & personality radio and author of *Creating Powerful Radio: Getting, Keeping & Growing Audiences*. For more: gellermmedia.com or creatingpowerfulradio.com. Geller is presenting a *Creating Powerful Radio* session in Charlotte at the NAB on Friday, September 28th at 2:00 PM – "Valerie Geller's Create Powerful Radio: Never Lose a Listener" Charlotte Convention Center 213D.