

The Brand

K-Rock, Alice, Star, Movin', Jammin', Kiss, Extreme, The Eagle, The X, Channel Z, The Zone, Live, The Wave, Jack, The Ticket, Progressive, The Rock, The Beat, Virgin, Funky Monkey, The Banana, The Buzz, Amp, The Planet. Whatever your station's name is only makes an impact when the image behind it creates the brand.

Think of your radio station as more than just a frequency that people tune into to hear music. It's a brand of entertainment that they can't get anywhere else. The brand of your station must be unique to stand out among all of the choices people have when it comes to listening to their favorite music or talk show...THEIR favorite station.

Why would anyone choose to listen to your station when they have all their faves on their iPod? Why would anyone choose to listen to your station when they have all their favorite CDs? Why would anyone choose to listen to your station when they can watch political pundits on TV or the internet? Why would anyone listen to your station when they can create their own "radio station" on-line? They do it because they identify with your brand. An emotional connection with your listeners is essential in creating a radio station brand. Enough with the, "All the hits," "The Best Variety," "More Rock, Less Talk," "Today's Best Country," "Songs from the 70s, 80s, 90s and Today." These slogans are tired and unoriginal. Most importantly they don't offer anything to the listener but empty, pompous declarations. Most of which only really MEAN anything to people in the radio industry who refer to them as, "positioning statements." Drop the slogans and instead of saying it, DO it. If your station plays, "All The Hits," then PLAY ALL THE FREAKIN' HITS!

"New Music First." Bullshit. I already downloaded it from the internet.

"The best hits from the 80s, 90s, and today." Don't think so. Those are just the best songs you could come up with based on research and focus groups.

"Number One Hit Music." Number one in what? Number one station that 5 year-olds listen to? Number one hit music station in the Wednesday evening softball tournament against the country station across the street?

"Only the Best Classic Rock." Most of it has probably been played on the radio since 1970...so let's say, "Only the most played classic rock." There are definitely better songs that have never seen an FM signal in their lives.

"Less talk, more variety." Probably not. Chances are you're running tons of commercials just like the competitor so no, there's not less talk. And what about this: "More variety." More variety than what? My iPod? Nope. My choices of satellite radio, internet radio, mp3s, CDs? Nope. I'd bet these probably far outshine your stations so-called "variety," so stop saying it. If

you really want to be the station with less talk and more variety, then just have less talk on the air and play more songs. It's that simple...don't just say it, do it.

No matter what format your station is, make an emotional connection to your listener. How do you do that? Create the brand by having the station sound and act like the coolest listeners you have. What songs do they listen to on their mp3 player? How do they speak to friends? What kinds of movies do they like? What kind of car do they drive? Where do they live? How educated are they? How old are they? Who are their favorite actors? What type of TV shows do they watch? What nationality are they? What town do they live in? How much internet surfing do they do? Do they use social networking like Facebook and Twitter? How do they feel about government? Where do they go for entertainment? Where do they go for news? Do they care about current events? Ask them!

Answer those questions and you have your "stationality." By the way, I did not coin that word. I went on the internet to figure out who did and probably 3 different people are credited for coining "stationality" so this is like me giving credit to anyone who made it up. For the record, IT WAS NOT ME.

Okay...so, yeah...answer the questions and you have your "stationality." Everything that happens on your station should reflect that. Even the commercials should fit your station. Running a commercial for the Metal Concert on your smooth jazz station makes no sense. Or a denture cream commercial on the Pop station...that's way outside your brand. The commercials that are produced at your station should sound hot and entertaining. Make sure that there is a decent communication stream between sales and production people so that the brand is never compromised.

Station branding is as essential as the programming, especially with today's rating system. Station branding comes right down to the promise the station makes to the listener. If your station is rated by Arbitron's PPM system, then I'm sure you've heard a million theories, freak-outs, and scares about it. There have even been so-called "authorities" that have said that in a PPM world all you have to do to get ratings is play music. Just play it with little to no imaging or DJ talk. Just get back to the music. They've even said that PPM is a flawed rating system, but then again they probably thought that about the old diary system. The bottom line is this: To get ratings, you have to have a great product. That means answering that essential question that I brought up at the beginning of this chapter:

Why would anyone choose to listen to your station?

You need to offer something to the listener that they just cannot get anywhere else. People today do plug their iPods into their cars and ignore radio, but not that much.

Even with advancements in digital media, "Most say they will listen to as much AM/FM radio in the future despite Advancements in Technology." In fact, monthly, up to 76% of online radio users, 68% of Internet-Only Audio users, 73% of Digital Audio in Car users, and 73% of people

who listen to music on cell phones will listen to as much AM/FM according to The Infinite Dial 2010 Arbitron/Edison Research 2010.

Do you know anyone who doesn't have a radio? At least in their car? Radio is easily accessible and free. It's even showing up in our cell phones with FM chips installed – just plug in your earbuds and go! So why does it seem like radio gets lost in the mix? Why do people bad mouth it? Why does it seem like everyone's talking about the death of radio? Because, it seems like radio is slowly committing suicide! We've got to give our listeners something entertaining and interesting...and so many stations just drive their listeners away.

How do you get them back? Give them what their iPod cannot...unique entertainment, and experience. Get them talking about what they heard on the radio that day. Have your station reflect their lives. Get those listeners to participate. Make it tough for them to miss what could be next on your station. Are you the station that plays new music, breaks bands, and is on the music scene in your city? Prove it...on the air. Are you a news station that challenges political figures? Prove it...call the State Senator, put him/her on the air and ask the tough questions...hell, ask the embarrassing questions and maybe a few personal ones. Are you the station that plays the most new country? Why aren't those artists on your air and on your website playing acoustic versions of their hit exclusively on your station? Did you ask them to? Sometimes all it takes is an email, a phone call, or a good old fashioned letter!

The Brand of your station should be sturdy, real, and reliable. The first thing I think about, unfortunately, when I hear the word, "brand" is a hot iron branding a rancher's symbol onto a cow. The point of branding is to burn an image into your listeners head. So if your PD says your sweepers are burning...isn't that the point? You want it to burn. Some of the most successful radio stations I have worked for have literally been playing some of their sweepers for over twenty years. You want the listeners to say it right back to you, "The World Famous KROQ," "JACK-FM, Playing What We Want," "KNAC – Pure Rock," "WRIF Detroit – RIF Rocks!" And one of my all time favorites... the Hawaiian rock station, "KPOI – The Rock You Live On."

The Brand truly should be the most protected part of your station. Yet some PDs seem afraid to build on it. They keep everything really safe. That's no way to expand your audience. I've been at radio stations before where PDs rely so heavily on research, auditorium tests, call-out tests, and so-on that the brand of the station gets pushed so far off to the side that you end up hearing the same tired songs over and over. Or worse, new songs that sound so much like the old songs that the station becomes stagnant. I've heard great morning shows become as boring as 10th grade Algebra class because research showed that their celebrity trivia segment was popular. So now all they do is celebrity trivia and reports and sightings. Where's the creativity?

Think of all the great radio personalities past and present. What made them great was their ability to invent, create, captivate, and entertain. My guess is that you got into this business because you also wanted to invent, create, captivate, and entertain. Now's the time. Dare to put entertaining radio on your air and reap the rewards. If your PD doesn't get it, throw this book on his desk.

