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Commentary

IPod Didn't Kill The Radio Star

MJ Keehn, Apr 21, 2009 05:00 AM

"Nobody listens to radio anymore."

In the last two months, I've heard this phrase upon recommending radio as part of our client's marketing campaign. Since I hold the belief that there are no bad media, just bad media planning, I think it is worth exploring how radio can play a vital role in today's brand marketing programs.

Radio's viability as an advertising medium might logically be in question because of the many music channels now available: MP3s, smartphones, satellite, cable music channels, podcasts and Internet radio.

With all these new channels, it is reasonable to assume that nobody out there is tuning in.

Yes, Virginia, People Do Listen To Radio

Let's look at stats as reported by www.RAB.com from Arbitron RADAR 100, March 2009:

- 93% of all people 12+ tune into radio each week and 72% listen daily
- 95% of adults with \$50,000 plus incomes can be reached each week as is also true of college graduates
- Average time spent listening each week is 19 hours
- 81% of Americans can be reached in their vehicles every week

This research demonstrates consumers are still tuning in to hear what's new, spend a few minutes with a favorite personality, find out about their commute, and You fill in the rest because, if you think about it, there are lots of reasons to tune in.

But for media planners who believe solid media work must go beyond simple delivery numbers and low CPMs, there are even more reasons for keeping radio in integrated plans.

Keeping Radio in the Mix

It's been long established that the closer you can get your message to an actual purchase, the more valuable that media choice is in producing sales. So, for the countless purchase decisions we make while we are out and about, radio scores high.

Hungry? Here's a message for the new burrito at Taco Bell. Feeling lucky? Pick up a lottery ticket at the c-store where you buy gas. No plans for Friday night? Hollywood Video is right on your way home. So, beyond the Arbitron numbers, radio is a winner in my book because it delivers a message

in proximity to a sales opportunity.

In addition, radio can lengthen the marketing/media window and, when added to the media mix it can strengthen payback ROI as has been shown in many marketing mix modeling studies. But equally important is radio's ability to deliver an element of audience engagement not usually possible with other media. Happily, radio stations are still willing to create promotional programs that build interaction and connection with their audience.

For example: stations can provide access to their listeners via concerts that allow for product sampling. DJs can enhance message comprehension with call-in contests such as one for Elizabeth Arden's Skinsimple line where listeners called in every time they heard a kissing sound.

Stations can create custom events such as the Gain Detergent Laundromat Parties, prompting listeners to turn out to do laundry with DJs. When on-air personalities are enlisted to try your product, the media buy becomes their endorsements in their own voices.

Programs like these allow marketers to connect in meaningful ways with an audience who has just identified their interest through some participation made possible by the station. Radio is a great facilitator in starting conversations between consumers and brands.

So Let Me Count the Ways

Radio does deliver in an integrated media plan:

1. It has good reach penetration. The numbers prove people are still listening.
 2. Its cost efficiency means marketers have a longer media/marketplace presence.
 3. As a complimentary, lower cost channel radio is a ROI force multiplier in a media mix.
 4. A presence close in time to a purchase decision combats out-of-sight, out-of-mind.
 5. Creative promotional programs help brands build relationships with consumers.
- Sometimes underappreciated and often overlooked, radio can be the secret weapon in a well-crafted, highly effective media program.

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