

# Commercial Radio Promotion

by

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## Introduction to Marketing

The marketing of radio is unique among all of business marketing. Unlike virtually every other business, radio station managers have almost no influence over four of the five basic elements of marketing<sup>1</sup>. Other business managers (from fax machines to soap) can control the way their product or service is *distributed*, the *price* that is charged, the characteristics of the *product* itself and the post-purchase *service* offered. But radio managers have very little, if any, control over any of these.

Radio station managers can't control the **Place** where their station's programming is consumed because listening can occur anywhere — in homes, offices, cars, at beaches and playgrounds, along the street and anywhere on earth over the internet! One recent study indicated over 40 percent of all radio listening occurs in cars.

Radio station managers cannot control the **Price** charged for their product because radio station listening is virtually free to the consumer.

For most formats, station management has very little control of the **Product** as well. Music-oriented stations rely on the decisions made by music companies or satellite-distributed syndication services. Even news and talk stations are driven by events beyond the direct control of station management.

In other businesses, post-purchase service includes items such as warranties, service contracts and the like. For radio station managers, **Post-purchase service** is limited to responding to listener complaints.

Of the five elements of marketing, only one — **Promotion** can be controlled by radio station managers. So, from a radio management

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<sup>1</sup> The basic elements of marketing are: 1) Channels of Distribution, 2) Price, 3) Product, 4) Promotion and 5) Post Purchase Service.

perspective, when it comes to attracting an audience, promotion *is* marketing<sup>2</sup>.

Radio does have one unique marketing advantage over other businesses -- the ability to promote itself on air -- but more about that later after just a bit of historical context.

## Radio Marketing History

The role of the radio station promotion manager has changed dramatically over the past half century. Before 1950, very few stations engaged in significant promotional activities. Competition among local stations was very limited and most programming was delivered by the networks,

By the mid-1950s, radio stations developed specialized formats to regain audiences that had been lost to television. To make the public aware of these programming changes, positions in promotion were created at many stations. But early promotion managers did little more than process contest entries and produce a few on-air promos. These promotion managers often worked only part-time, had other secretarial or production duties, and had little impact on managerial decision making.

By the 1960s, as competition among radio stations intensified, promotion managers began to develop specific identities for their stations. Station images were often closely tied to call letters (for example, WAKY in Louisville, WILD in Birmingham, KIVA in Santa Fe) and attention was paid to creating a consistent image both on air and in external advertising.

In the 1970s, as increased listening to FM doubled and sometimes tripled the number of commercially viable stations in a market, promotion managers developed strategies to position their stations competitively against other stations in their markets.

The 1980s saw a refinement of these image-oriented positioning strategies, with greater reliance on ratings information and other customized research in making promotion decisions.

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<sup>2</sup> The other perspective, not examined here, is the marketing of the station to its advertisers or clients.

By the 1990s a reconsolidation of radio had come full force. The elimination of the duopoly rules, and increase in the number of stations one company could own significantly increased the power and authority of radio promotion managers – now called market promotion managers or directors. With multiple stations in a market, cross promotion and strategic positioning of station images became vital. Distribution options increased with the advent of real time internet audio delivery. Promotion managers in the 1990s were increasingly called upon to create and manage event driven marketing including the acquisition of revenue from non-traditional revenue sources or NTR.

Promotion managers today commonly influence decisions regarding sales, station image, format, personalities, news, research, and general management policy. Radio station general managers are increasingly looking to fill promotion management positions with highly motivated individuals who have both academic and professional experience in all of the following areas: marketing, ratings analysis, media buying, research design, positioning, creative copy-writing, technology innovation and sales promotion.

Filling their promotion management positions with the best possible talent is now seen as critical to the overall success of virtually all stations outside of the very smallest markets.

## Radio Promotion Goals

Radio station promotion has five distinct goals:

- 1) **Audience acquisition** -- give prospective new listeners a reason to tune in
- 2) **Audience maintenance** -- give current listeners a reason to stay tuned
- 3) **Audience recycling** -- give listeners who must tune out a reason to tune in again later
- 4) **Sales promotion** -- give advertisers a reason to buy time
- 5) **Internal promotion** -- generate excitement and motivation among the station staff.

Radio station promotion managers have only three channels through which they can achieve these goals: 1) external media (print,

television, outdoor, direct mail, internet etc.), 2) internal media (on-air) and 3) on co-owned stations<sup>3</sup> in the same market.

Successful promotion managers generate strategies using these three channels to achieve each of the five promotion goals identified above. Potential listeners may be persuaded to listen to the station because of effective media buying, event broadcasts, station-sponsored community events, mail-out and call-out contests, publicity, and word-of-mouth campaigns.

Current listeners may be given a reason to stay tuned, or tune in again later, because of effective on-air contests, cross-promotion between dayparts, and cross-promotion across commonly owned stations<sup>4</sup>.

Promotion managers may give potential advertisers a reason to buy advertising time on the station through sales promotions that involve tie-ins with station contests, live broadcasts from the advertiser's place of business, or co-sponsorship of station-generated community events. Promotion managers may also call on advertisers directly to barter for giveaways and contest prizes.

Finally, many promotion managers produce internal newsletters, recruit other station personnel to assist in promotional activities, and distribute specialty merchandise items to station employees in an attempt to generate excitement and create an esprit de corps among the station staff.

## Positioning

Listeners' perceptions of what a radio station represents can be vastly more important than the reality of the station's programming. The important thing to remember is that *the listener's perception of the station is all that matters*. If the listener *perceives* the station as sounding better, then, for that listener, the reality is that the station does indeed sound better.

For example, a station that heavily promotes commercial-free time blocks may be perceived as less commercial, even when (counting all dayparts) it carries more commercials than its competitors. Successful

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<sup>3</sup> Sometimes called "sister stations."

<sup>4</sup> The goal here is to cross promote in such a way as to match up the listener's desires with the benefits offered by the station and thus increase overall time spent listening to the group of co-owned stations.

promotion managers produce campaigns designed to create these perceived advantages. This *perceived competitive advantage* is created not only in relation to other radio stations but also in relation to other media consumption or non-radio listening compatible leisure time activities. (Notice that many leisure time activities *are* compatible with radio listening such as jogging, driving, spectator sports, etc.). Successful marketing managers of all kinds focus on the *image* or *perception* of their product or service in the minds of their consumers. In marketing, *perception* is reality

Tom Peters and Bob Watterman (in their series of books including *In Search of Excellence*) identify this characteristic of successful companies as “Staying close to the customer.” Rick Sklar in a spin-off book titled *Radio In Search of Excellence* refers to “Keep(ing) a listener’s ear view of radio.” He continues: “We radio people, promoting a medium that you can’t see, touch or feel, must keep a listener’s perspective to win listeners.” Successful promotion managers stay close to their listeners by focusing on these perceptions. They rely on such research strategies as call-out surveys and focus groups to identify both perceptions of their station and listeners’ perceptions of their competitors.

Most information on radio listening, however, comes from diaries, the highly criticized source for radio ratings. Conclusions regarding audience size, flow, recycling, and maintenance assume that diary keepers can accurately record or remember all of their radio listening. This is a significant and problematic assumption. Many diaries are filled out some time after listening has occurred by diary-keepers who attempt to remember the call letters and time of day that they listened for all the stations they heard for the past week.

Actual station listening that is unreported because of inaccurate diary keeping, forgetfulness, or uncertainty regarding the station heard, is called *lost cume*. Because of the delay between listening and reporting, many promotion managers and broadcast marketing consultants believe that the positioning of a station relative to the positions occupied by its competitors is vastly more important for ratings success than actual station listening. Because they are unlikely to recall all of their listening accurately, Arbitron diary-keepers are likely to record the station that presents the image with which they most closely identify. In other words, *the station that they perceive as closest to their desired lifestyle is likely to be the one that they report listening to, whether they actually listened during their diary-keeping week or not.* Therefore, occupying the position most compatible with the desired lifestyle of your target

audience is more important for ratings success than influencing actual listening behavior.

## Audience Acquisition, Maintenance, and Recycling

While diary-based ratings success can be generated by an effective positioning campaign, the station's long-term profitability ultimately will depend on its ability to generate *results* for station advertisers. To do this, a station must first attract as large an audience as possible and then maintain that audience across commercial breaks. Maintaining listeners through a commercial break requires a variety of promotion techniques. Some of the audience will be unable to easily change stations – for example those at work, involved in other activity (a volleyball game, for example) and the like. Others will be in a position to easily change stations – for example when driving a car. Thus many stations promote upcoming traffic and weather conditions just prior to commercial breaks. Others seamlessly integrate sponsorship messages into program material

Audience maintenance strategies aim to maximize the AQH rating of the station by increasing the average listener's TSL. Stations benefiting most from audience maintenance promotion have a high cume rating but low AQH rating (short TSLs). In other words the station has a large disloyal audience which listens for relatively short periods of time before, perhaps, shifting to another station. This large disloyal audience is the target of maintenance promotion, and on-air promotion and programming strategies are emphasized.

Audience acquisition strategies aim to increase the cume (cumulative) rating of the station by increasing sampling of the station by non-listeners. Stations that benefit most from audience acquisition promotion are those with high AQH (Average-Quarter-Hour) ratings but low cume ratings (in other words, these stations have long TSLs — Time Spent-Listening, among a small, loyal group of listeners). Because the target audience is nonlisteners of the station, stations must use external media for audience acquisition promotions.

Audience recycling strategies aim to increase the overall station AQH ratings and the cume for a given daypart. Their target is the station's current audience. Stations that will benefit the most from an audience recycling strategy are those that have high cumes in one daypart, but low cumes in another daypart.

Audience recycling can be either vertical (later in the day) or horizontal (same daypart later in the week). **Vertical recycling** is achieved when a given daypart's audience returns to the station later on the same day. For example, the morning drive audience returns to listen in afternoon drive. **Horizontal recycling** is achieved when a given daypart's audience returns to listen to the same daypart later in the week. For example, Monday's morning drive time audience listens to Tuesday's morning drive. Vertical recycling recycles audiences across dayparts; horizontal recycling recycles audiences across days of the week.

Eight basic promotional strategies are used in radio to achieve all audience maintenance, acquisition and recycling goals.

They are:

1. Contests and giveaways
2. External media buying
3. Merchandising
4. Publicity and public relations
5. Direct mail and telemarketing
6. Event marketing
7. On-air promotion
8. Cross promotion on co-owned stations

## Contests and Giveaways

Contests may be designed to achieve audience maintenance, acquisition, or recycling goals. Careful analysis of a station's ratings will provide vital information on the best way to design its contests. For example, a station that enjoys high cumes but low TSLs might design an audience maintenance-based contest similar to that shown in Figure 7-1. Winning requires listening to the station for several hours at a time, thus increasing the TSLs and AOH ratings of the station.

Figure 7-1 Sample Contest Card and Sample Rules for Music Bingo

Bill Taylor. Used with permission.

On the other hand, if analysis of the ratings shows that the station enjoys high TSLs but has a low cume, an audience acquisition contest like that shown in Figure 7-2 should be used. Notice how the

requirements to “Set all your radios to LA’s Magic 106,” to “Listen each morning,” and to “Display this sticker on your vehicle,” are designed for audience acquisition. Winning the contest requires listening to the station for only short time periods. This is obviously a station that enjoys high TSLs. The promotion manager has determined that the best strategy for ratings success is to increase sampling of the station by non-listeners, and TSLs will come automatically.

Figure 7-2 Bumper Sticker for LA’s Magic 106 FM Contest.

KPWR-FM. Used with permission.

Ratings analysis could show the need for an audience recycling strategy. For example, a station’s afternoon drive daypart might be performing well, but mornings are dismal. In this case, you could design a contest that is heavily promoted in afternoon drive but requires listeners to listen during morning drive to win. This strategy assumes that there is nothing inherently wrong with your morning drive programming. One of the worst mistakes a station (or any advertiser) can make is to heavily promote a bad product. When morning drive is dismal because of bad talent or poor programming, promoting morning drive may hurt afternoon drive ratings rather than help morning drive ratings. Listeners who are turned off by your morning drive programming may decide not to tune into the station at all. The next time you hear a radio station contest, ask yourself whether the contest has audience acquisition, maintenance, or recycling goals.

Giveaways may be designed to appeal to light listeners of the station (“I’ve got two free tickets for the first person to call in”) or heavy listeners (“You could win \$1000 if you hear the following three songs played back-to-back anytime this month”). It’s important to provide balance between these games and giveaways. Too many complex contests that necessitate long TSLs to participate (or even understand) may leave light listeners feeling completely left out (and give them a reason to tune out). Contests and giveaways can also be designed to increase vertical recycling (as in “We’ll give away this digital cell phone sometime this afternoon”) or horizontal recycling (“Your next chance to win will be at this same time tomorrow”).

Horizontal recycling needs are more difficult to determine. Specific day-of-week listening estimates are supplied by specialized reports such as Arbitron’s Fingerprint. Once this information has been examined, similar horizontal recycling strategies can be employed. For example, if

mid-day listening is lowest on Tuesdays, contests and promotions can be heavily promoted on other weekdays, with the winners announced on Tuesdays.

Very few of a station's listeners are actually likely to participate in station contests or giveaways. Even fewer will win. Therefore, all contests and giveaways should be designed to be entertaining for nonparticipating listeners. Contests and giveaway announcements should not become a tune-out factor for most of your station's audience.

For the vast majority of stations, promotion budgets for contest and giveaway prizes is very limited. To increase the value or number of prizes, *sales* promotions are commonly used. Frequently these promotions will be tied to the generation of new business accounts at the station. For example, the promotion manager at an El Paso station wanted to design a \$10,000 giveaway but didn't have the money in the budget. In conjunction with the sales manager, the promotion manager designed a month-long spot schedule at \$1,000 each for 12 clients. The spots were scheduled to run during the first quarter when inventory pressures were low. Out of the total \$12,000, \$2,000 covered sales commissions and expenses, leaving \$10,000 for the contest prize. (All clients had to be new business for the station; no retailer who had recently advertised on the station could participate in this special package.) As part of the promotion, each client received a free remote on one of 12 consecutive Saturday afternoons. To participate in the contest, listeners had to register during the broadcast from the client's location. The result: a \$10,000 cash contest prize, motivated listeners, 12 new clients who saw the station's drawing power demonstrated live at their locations, a happy general manager, a contest that cost nothing, and at least one very satisfied listener.

Can you generate the excitement of a \$10,000 giveaway without actually giving away the money? One station in Seattle created a promotion that did just that. Wanting to promote their more music format, they offered this guarantee: If any listener ever heard less than 51 minutes of music during any one-hour period, the station would pay \$10,000. The promotion made enough impact to receive coverage in the local paper. It also generated a lot of excitement among listeners and increased the station's AQH ratings and TSLs significantly. The free coverage in other media caused a slight increase in cume ratings as well. There are some risks for this type of promotion, however. Important considerations to keep in mind include: (1) Establish a time limit for the promotion — What happens if your station changes format to all-talk

next year? (2) Include disclaimers — What happens if the station has a power outage? and (3) Have the money ready just in case.

Often contests don't have to have valuable prizes to generate effective promotional value. During a debate over legalizing gambling in Tennessee, WSIX-AM in Nashville offered listeners a free trip to neighboring Kentucky (where gambling on horse racing is legal) to "Watch for signs of organized crime, pin-striped suits, violin cases, . . . and other gambling related dangers." KNOW in Austin offered the listener-with-the ugliest-car a free paint job, body work, a new sound system, tune-up, new tires, and an oil change. The total value of the prize was around \$3,000. All of the items were traded with local retailers in return for free mentions in the contest.

Can a contest generate ratings for your station even when the station is off the air? KFMW in Waterloo experienced some technical problems that kept them off the air for an extended period. They created a "Down but not out" contest. Prizes included down comforters and down jackets, and the first listener to call the station when it went back on the air won \$108.

Sometimes the station doesn't have to offer any prize at all to have an effective contest. WSEN in Syracuse thrilled listeners with an April 1st extravaganza in a classic take-off of an old holiday prank. Winners were to receive a free tour of the Salt Museum (closed for the season), a tram tour of Onondaga Lake Park (closed until June), a tour of the French Fort (opens Memorial day), a guided walk around the Burnett Park Zoo (closed for renovations), and a ride on the famed roller coaster at Suburban Park (famed mostly because it burned to the ground in 1969). The contest generated numerous entries, received free press coverage in other local media, and helped to reinforce the station's not-too-serious, good natured image. Obviously, this contest would not suit a station concerned with creating an image of high credibility.

Finally, remember that a contest (or any other advertisement) which involves a prize, chance, and consideration is considered a lottery and may be illegal on your radio station. Any combination of two elements is allowed (giving a prize for a drawing is okay); but when all three elements are present, the contest comes under rules governing lotteries (spelled out in Chapter 1). Broadcasting information regarding a lottery (except certain state government-sponsored lotteries) may subject your station to a fine or loss of license.

Also, contests which may cause harm to the community or risk injury to the participants have been determined by the courts to be inconsistent with the “public interest” obligations of broadcasters and thus should be avoided. Todd Storz is credited with developing the prototype of questionable “public interest” contests in the 1950s on his innovative Top-40 stations. The most common was a “Treasure Hunt.” Typically, a check for \$105,000 was hidden somewhere in the community. Obscure clues were then given out on the air (obscure because the station hoped the check would not have to be paid!). After a certain date the value of the check decreased to a more modest sum, such as \$500. Treasure hunters arrived from hundreds of miles away to listen to the station for clues and hunt for the check. While treasure hunts certainly achieved audience acquisition and maintenance goals, the results sometimes backfired. First of all, the increase in cums, AQH ratings, and TSLs from this type of promotion are usually very temporary and seldom generate results for station advertisers. Also, ill will can be created because of the unclear clues, and when the check is not found in time, many treasure hunters feel cheated.

Occasionally, however, the clues have been only too clear. One radio station in New Orleans was blamed for causing extensive damage to the public library when the contest clues indicated that the check was hidden in one of the library’s books. Excited treasure hunters ransacked the library.

## External Media

Promotion managers make nearly all of the media buying decisions for their stations, regularly purchasing space and time in other media. Salespeople from competing media in the market call regularly on radio station promotion managers, attempting to secure a fair share of the radio station’s advertising budget. Some stations insulate themselves from these sales pitches by hiring an outside agency to do their media buying. Nevertheless, promotion managers should have a thorough understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of each competing medium in their markets. Evaluation of these other media will depend on a station’s format, target audience, image, positioning, and marketing goals. For example, it makes more sense for a Talk or Big Band station to advertise in a newspaper than for a CHR or Heavy Metal station because of the increasingly older demographics of typical newspaper readers.

It is also important to have a complete understanding of the cost structures of competing media. Effective media buying requires the ability to show the salesperson why a proposal is too costly and why your counter-proposal should be accepted. For audience acquisition, the most efficient media buy will be the one with the lowest cost per thousand (CPM) for *non-listeners* in the station's *target demographic*.

Television stations that use customized ratings reports such as Tapscan and Strata may be able to calculate appropriate demographic-based CPMs for non-listeners of your radio station. Of course, the overall effectiveness of the campaign will depend not just on efficient media buying but also on the creativity, execution, and overall appeal of your advertising. For radio stations, competing media to evaluate include broadcast television, cable television, newspaper, outdoor, telephone directory, transit, internet and, sometimes, other radio stations.

Television reaches virtually all audience demographic groups during some program time periods. All-news or talk radio stations may reach their target audience by advertising on local cable channels or on satellite delivered cable newscasts. Country stations may reach their target audience by advertising on a broadcast television station's country music special, while Alternative stations might consider advertising in late-night. Frequently newspapers, cable systems, and television stations will trade advertising time (on a dollar for dollar basis) with radio stations. The promotion manager, in conjunction with the sales manager, is responsible for developing these trade advertising sources.

Print media, such as newspapers and magazines, are also an advertising option for radio. Newspapers usually offer older demographics attractive to News, Talk, and Big Band formats. Promotional inserts in newspapers, which can be inserted in only some copies of the paper, are especially useful for targeting specific geographic areas. Some larger markets also have local or regional magazines in which radio stations can advertise. Targeting potential advertisers is sometimes more consistent with the readership of the magazine than targeting potential listeners.

Another form of print advertising, telephone directory advertising, may be especially important for stations desiring to reach newcomers to a market, such as young, upwardly mobile professionals. Directories of various types are particularly important in rapidly growing markets. Most markets now have two competing telephone-directory companies,

and advertising opportunities include not only the yellow pages but also the inside and back covers, as well as coupon pages.

Outdoor advertising, generally available in medium to large markets, is very seldom offered on a trade basis. A radio station's outdoor advertising decisions will depend to a large degree on the importance of drive-time radio listening in the market. The much-repeated cardinal rule for billboards is to keep the message short; three to five words make the most effective message. A second, but less repeated, rule is to make the message provocative. Just putting up pretty call letters and frequency is not enough to foster changes in behavior. By using information such as Arbitron's Fingerprint, stations can determine the most effective geographic areas for their outdoor advertising. Fingerprint will provide ratings information by Zip code. Stations can then target their outdoor placement to areas with good signal coverage but low listenership among the station's target demos. Figure 7-3 shows an example of an uncomplicated, painted bulletin that effectively positions the station.

Figure 7-3 A Painted Bulletin for KNBR

KNBR. Used with Permission.

There are two basic types of outdoor bulletins: poster-panel and painted. The standard poster-panel billboard runs 12 feet-3 inches high by 24 feet-6 inches wide. Ten to 15 sheets of printed poster paper are glued to it to create the large image. Painted bulletins are usually 14 feet high by 48 feet long. Each is custom designed and painted by hand. Because of different aspect ratios between painted and poster bulletins, the same graphic design cannot be used for both. Painted boards may also allow for some special effects (sometimes called spectaculars). Cutouts, for example, can be attached to the board to extend either its height or width. Notice how the fingers of the drowned ape extend above the board in Figure 7-4. Because of the cost of repainting and moving, painted bulletins are less flexible than poster boards and are usually sold for a period of one-year. Poster bulletins may be purchased for a few weeks or months, and they can easily be changed by repapering over the existing poster.

Transit advertising on subways, buses, taxis, and trains is generally available only in the largest markets. Audience demographics vary depending on the geographic area and who rides or sees the vehicles. For example, the demographics of riders of buses and subways

usually differ markedly from those of taxi or suburban commuter train riders, but the outside of all these vehicles may be viewed by the same inner-city population as they travel across town. In the largest markets, several types of transit advertising are available, including busboards (side, rear and front), bus stop or station posters (including airports, subways, and train terminals), and taxi boards or cab-tops. All of these are traveling billboards and take only limited messages. Many transit vehicles also sell space inside the bus, cab, or subway for signs (cards), which is especially useful for advertising long-term contests and promoting news. In addition, the promotion manager probably has responsibility for the custom painting of station-owned remote vans, boom boxes, sales cars, and so on.

One certain method for reaching light-or non-listeners of your station is to advertise on other radio stations! Many co-owned stations cross-promote each other's programming, especially in markets with five or more commonly owned stations. Less common are radio stations in the same market buying time on, or trading time with, their competitors. When it does occur, the trade usually involves a format change or a new station signing on the air. For example, a station that drops its Hard Rock format to go to All-Talk may allow its former Rock competitors to buy time promoting their rock format (for example, "For all the Rock you used to get here on KXXX, tune to KYYY"). Sometimes two stations with complementary formats may choose to cross-promote each other's programming. For instance, an All-News station and a Beautiful Music station may trade time promoting each other's formats (using on-air lines like "When you want the news it's here, but when you're ready to relax tune to WZZZ").

A less honest method for advertising on your competitors is to do it without their knowledge. Some stations have created a fictitious product and, through an advertising agency or other mediator, purchased time on their competitors. Unbeknownst to the other stations, the product was, in reality, a promotional vehicle for the competing station. The message has to be rather obscure to deceive anyone for long. In one example, radio stations in Denver and Knoxville created a new "Morning Flakes" cereal. After advertisements for the "Morning Flakes" cereal had run on their competitors' air, the real "Morning Flakes" were revealed to be the station's new morning drivetime personalities. The "Morning Flakes" cereal (which was a generic corn flakes and actually sold through a local grocery store chain) was packaged with photos of the morning team and other station promotional copy. See figure 7-4.

The important point to remember in all external media buying is that the goal is to reach the largest number of non-listeners in the desired demographic of your station. Thus, it might not make sense, from an audience acquisition perspective, for the All-News station to advertise in the newspaper or local television newscasts if a large percentage of those reached are already heavy listeners to the station. Information of this type can be gathered from station call-out, focus-group, or survey research. Numerous consulting firms and outside research companies can be hired to assist you in determining the most effective media buying strategy.

## Merchandising

Merchandising involves the distribution of customized station products. Merchandising opportunities vary widely from the simple printing of station T-shirts and bumper stickers to the creation of a forty-foot, oversized, inflatable station mascot or hot-air balloon (see Figure 7-5). Specialty merchandise firms inundate stations with offers of customized key chains, pens, paper weights, mouse pads, wind-chill charts, emergency-phone-number refrigerator magnets, coffee mugs, buttons, pocket knives, flashlights, clocks, rugs, umbrellas, clothing, luggage, and virtually anything else you can imagine — all, of course, emblazoned with the radio station's logo and call letters.

Some stations have found that the merchandising of custom clothing and other items through local retail stores can be both profitable and effective promotion. KATT in Oklahoma City has met with great success selling its specialty merchandise through a chain of local truck-stops. Chicago's WLUP produced the flyer shown in Figure 7-6 for selling its specialty merchandise via mail-order from the station.

Merchandising and specialty merchandise giveaways can be effective audience maintenance tools as well. Some stations (usually as part of a sales promotion) create coupon books or specialized plastic cards offering discounts at local retail outlets. The plastic card or coupon book appears to entitle the listener to special privileges as part of a "WXXX Club." This feeling of belonging and identification among listeners with membership or ownership in the station is central to promotional success. Figure 7-7 shows coupons offered in B-97 sales promotion, part of a booklet paid for by dozens of sponsors. Figure 7-8 shows a plastic card carrier for KDES touting discounts and cash prizes for listening.

Positive feelings for a station can be significantly enhanced by giving away specialty merchandise (often as simple as distributing bumper stickers) or manufacturing and selling clothing and other merchandise marked with the station's logo. For many AOR-oriented listeners (typically males 18 to 24 years old) and many country music station fans of all ages, the act of applying a bumper sticker from their favorite radio station to their first car represents a significant rite of passage. Wearing the name of a specialized radio station psychologically identifies many listeners with the lifestyle presented by the station.

Wearing clothing or carrying useful items marked with their favorite station's logo can be a self-concept statement at least as significant as seeking out only Gerbeau jeans shirts or Nike footwear.

Figures 7-9 and 7-10 show two bumper stickers for radio stations. The WOWO bumper sticker was sponsored by both Pepsi and Marathon Oil but successfully promotes the station by giving it top billing; the two sponsors receive only a small portion of the space but remain readable. The ZPL bumper sticker relegates the sponsor to coupons on the peel-off backing. Stations can also use a sticker's peel-off backing to promote programming. Many stations lose half of the value of their stickers by failing to utilize the reverse side and failing to put the station's name on the back.

## Publicity and Public Relations

The goal of a publicity strategy is to get free coverage for your station in competing media. This may be as simple as keeping the newspaper media-critic informed of this week's sports broadcast schedule or as complex as creating a mystery character who randomly gives away \$100 bills around town and is later revealed to be your station's new morning personality (but only after the newspapers, television stations, and other radio stations have covered the story). The \$10,000 listening guarantee and ugly car contests mentioned earlier are excellent examples of promotions that also achieved publicity goals. Press releases for publicity stunts should be sent to all of the competing media in your station's coverage area.

Press releases, written notices of newsworthy events, are generally handled by the promotion manager and should be sent out for all station events, including internal station personnel promotions; the hiring of new personalities, sales, and managerial staff; and broadcast industry or

local civic awards. Press releases should be sent to the local newspapers, television stations, broadcast trade magazines, and the employee's hometown newspaper. New station programming, call-letter changes, studio location shifts, and technical improvements should also be announced in press releases. Promotion managers should routinely maintain biographical data on all station management and air talent.

## Event Marketing

Stations often sponsor or co-sponsor events large enough to attract attention from the community at large. Many radio stations have tackled coordinating the local Fourth of July fireworks display or other holiday events. Accompanied by a custom music track, the event can be simultaneously broadcast by the station. Many music-oriented stations sponsor and broadcast a local charity's fund drive (such as Toys for Tots) as well as benefit concerts. Figure 7-11 shows a charity-based co-promotion by Z-104, two television stations, the Salvation Army, and several other agencies cooperating to produce a Christmas cash donation.

## Public Relations

The goal of a public relations strategy is to develop one-on-one relationships with current or potential listeners. Word of mouth is commonly cited as the most effective form of advertising, and a public relations strategy is one of the most effective methods for generating word of mouth advertising. These strategies include live on-location broadcasts, station personality appearances, and station tours.

Remotes, broadcasts from locations other than the station's studio, often occur in conjunction with sales promotion activities, but they may also be used to generate higher visibility for the station's personalities. Broadcasting from the top of a flagpole, interstate billboard, underwater cabin, or other outrageous location may generate both free publicity for the station and greater listening among former light- or non-listeners.

Some remote broadcasts may even originate from outside the station's coverage area. For example, some stations have sent their most popular personality on an around-the-world tour (usually part of a travel-agency sales promotion) that included broadcasts from "thirty countries in thirty days."

Personality appearances may involve speeches to local civic groups, a station softball or basketball team, interviews on local broadcast or cable television shows, and public participation in community events. As everyone learns the hard way, the personality needs complete instructions regarding the exact time and location of the appearance and an ample quantity of station giveaway items (bumper stickers, photos of the personality, etc.). If the appearance is before a civic organization, the promotion manager should provide the organization's chairperson with the personality's biography, arrange for media coverage by the local newspaper and television stations if appropriate, and provide photographs and another copy of the personality's biography to the editor of the organization's newsletter. Better to have overkill than a wasted opportunity and annoyance all the way around.

Station tours are commonly conducted by the promotion manager. Various high school, civic and even listener groups often want to see the studio facilities. Some stations have even sponsored vocational radio programs (for groups such as the Boy Scout Explorers or the local high school radio club). The promotion manager typically becomes the organization's advisor and in return gathers a nearly inexhaustible supply of energetic station interns.

Special remotes and personality appearances can have a strong impact on audience maintenance because they allow loyal listeners the opportunity to identify more closely with the station. At station-sponsored community events, loyal listeners should receive special consideration (such as priority seating, free tickets, or station giveaways). Such perks may be earned by random On-air invitations, direct mail, Or telemarketing efforts.

## Direct Mail and Telemarketing

Direct mail, a rapidly growing area of broadcast promotion activity, refers to mass mailings, usually handled by commercial companies that specialize in direct mail. By utilizing services such as Arbitron's Fingerprint, radio stations can target specific demographic groups (by Zip code) with direct mail campaigns. Most commonly, a station advertiser sponsors secret contests that only receivers of the direct mail piece know about. The mailer, for example, may inform the recipient that the first person to call the station after a specific song is played will receive a cash reward, although no mention of this is made on-air.

Telemarketing efforts, referring to telephone sales, are often directed at “in-office” listeners. At-work listening has become increasingly important to radio stations, especially during the mid-day daypart, and raising mid-day listening can greatly influence afternoon drive ratings. Frequently at-work listening is forced listening (listening over which the radio consumer has no control). This occurs in car-pools, shopping malls, retail outlets, and in many workplaces. Forced listening has taken on a greater importance as a result of Arbitron’s latest diary which asks diary-keepers to record all stations that they have “heard.” The previous diary asked diary-keepers to record stations that they “listened to.” Forced listening was apparently underestimated because diary keepers felt that such listening didn’t count unless they had chosen the station. Obviously, workplace listening can involve significant numbers of hours of exposure to a particular station.

Telemarketing efforts often reward those office and retail managers who control radio station selection at their workplace. Promotion managers (or their assistants) may randomly call businesses listed in the yellow pages and offer a cash reward and on-air business mention to the manager (as in “Thanks to Dan’s Auto Repair for listening to Q95”). Someone from Dan’s would then have a limited period of time to call in and claim the prize (although, again, no mention of this would be made on-air if the offer is in conjunction with a “secret contest”). Telemarketing efforts can also be directed at households in problem Zip-code areas (by matching telephone prefix numbers with geographic areas). Several outside marketing companies specialize in this type of promotion for radio stations and other businesses.

Some stations generate mailing and phone lists from contest entries and design specialized promotional appeals to these known listeners. For example, a direct mail piece may be sent informing these current listeners of a secret contest which only they may enter. Telemarketing efforts may sample these listeners to generate feedback on station promotions or music selection. All such efforts give loyal listeners a special sense of belonging or identification with the station and ultimately increase TSLs.

## On-Air Promotion

By far, the most important strategy for generating high levels of audience maintenance is effective use of your station’s own air time. Arbitron counts someone as listening to a station if they report hearing the station for at least five continuous minutes within a quarter-hour.

This ratings method affects the formatting, the scheduling of commercial breaks, news, and promotional announcements, at most stations. Some radio stations, for example, have designed their format clocks so that commercials appear between 6 and 9 minutes into a quarter hour (in other words, from :06 to :09, :21 to :24, and so on) under the theory that AQH ratings will be maximized by sweeping listeners across the quarter-hour breaks. Thus, a listener who tunes in at 10 minutes past the hour will not hear a commercial (and not have a reason to tune out) until 21 minutes past the hour. This listener will then be credited in diaries with two full quarter hours (one half hour) of listening, even though the listener was only tuned in for 11 minutes.

Bumpers are another strategy for sweeping quarter hours. Stations place promotional announcements for station contests just before the commercial break (“Sometime in the next 20 minutes we’ll have our next cash call contest”) and pro-announce the title and artist of the record coming after the commercial break (“After this break we’ll have the latest from 2 Live Crew”). All-News and Talk stations often bump (pre- announce) the local weather or another feature following the commercials. Also, many stations make a point of giving the time just before a commercial break, assuming that some diary keepers will hear the time announcement and accurately record having listened for that full five minute period within the quarter hour. A few stations have gotten a little carried away with this. One station in Chicago was caught giving incorrect time announcements. Although their time announcements were only off by a few minutes (for example, announcing that it was 20 minutes past the hour when it was only 17 minutes past), the fact that they were altering the time to influence ratings placed them in serious trouble with the ratings companies.

The term cross-promotion may refer to promotion of other media on the station’s air or to promoting the station’s other dayparts on the air. Cross-promotions can be designed for vertical maintenance (“Later today on the Rollye James show”) or horizontal maintenance (“Tomorrow at this time we’ll be interviewing Mayor Delaurentis”). While this sounds simple, one of the most difficult tasks faced by a promotion manager is getting the air personalities to talk to or about each other (at least on the air). Many stations require air personalities to produce brief (10 to 20 second) promos for their next day’s airshift. Often these are prerecorded by the personality for use throughout the day. Other generic promos may be produced by one personality promoting another personality’s show. Remember the goal of cross-promotion is audience maintenance and recycling-giving the listener a reason to stay tuned or, when the

listener must tune out (as is often the case following morning drive), giving the listener a reason to tune in later (for example, a reason to listen to afternoon drive).

## Sales Promotion

Up to this point, we have focused on audience promotion. The goal of sales promotion is to give prospective advertisers an incentive to buy time on the station. Sales promotions that have an on-air component, such as a contest, actively involve the promotion manager. Sales promotions that interfere with audience acquisition and maintenance goals, however, should be avoided at all costs. Their short-term monetary gain may be attractive, but they are not worth the threat of long-term loss of audience. Sometimes stations that are about to be sold to new owners will freely engage in such promotions in an effort to maximize the current cash flow of the station (and thus increase the station's sales price) without regard to the station's long-term best interests.

Client incentives that involve the promotion department are usually similar to the audience acquisition strategies outlined above. For example, a station may offer free advertising (or discounted rates) to clients who have the radio station turned on in their stores when an account executive comes to the store. Clients (or their children, friends, or relatives) often want station specialty merchandise or autographed photos of station personalities, and usually the sales department will expect the promotion manager to handle such requests.

Co-sponsorship, the joint backing of events, is often the key to advertising sales and the promotion of big events. Stations need major national advertisers to co-sponsor community events (for example, a "Miller Lite/KXXX Summer Tan Contest" or a "Pepsi/WYYY Labor Day Fireworks Show"). Local and national advertisers commonly become involved in one of three ways: (1) by serving as a registration location for a contest ("You can register at any Nite Owl Food Mart, Raven Records, or White Castle location"), (2) by providing contest prizes ("Win a free computer from Data World"), or (3) by jointly backing a sales promotion with the station (for example, paying the cost of bumper stickers when they have a coupon for a free Pepsi on the peel-off backing).

Co-sponsorship creates many promotional opportunities that would not otherwise be available to the station because of budget limitations. However, stations must be careful to limit the number of co-

sponsored promotions to avoid listener perceptions that the station is merely an extension of its advertisers. Moreover, stations must limit the number of co-sponsors for each contest or event; more is not necessarily better: Many station call letters have been completely lost when too many cosponsors were involved. For example, the “Cableworld, Daily Journal, WZZZ-TV-12, Burger World, KYYY-FM, Super Summer Sweepstakes” is of very little promotional value to the radio station.

With some corporations now owning over 200 stations, corporate-level sales promotion management positions are becoming more common. The corporate sales promotion department is responsible for creating regional or company-wide sales promotions for major advertisers. Revenue generated by these kinds of activities is today referred to as a “non-traditional revenue” source or as “non-spot dollars.”

## Station Morale

Station image campaigns are ineffective when they are inconsistent with the unwritten message the station’s employees communicate. Personnel dissatisfaction and cynicism about the station easily circulate through networks of friends and business acquaintances, sometimes creating an identity at odds with the image management prefers. Promotion managers can help forestall image problems in several ways. The easiest is to encourage everyone to become involved in station promotions. Giveaway items should be readily available to station staff members (who may want them for their own use or to give to friends, relatives, or neighbors). More expensive items should be made available to station employees at reduced cost. Staff members should be kept informed of upcoming promotional events and station-sponsored community activities by distributing internal memos.

In addition, the promotion manager frequently will be responsible for an internal station newsletter, station business cards, station lobby or window displays, the outside building sign, the station van or car, and so on. All of these items should, of course, reflect a consistent image of the station. Creating occasional in-house newsletters covering the personal achievements of the staff is especially effective for sharing management’s pride in its staff and their efforts, thus building morale. All employees should be reminded that they represent the station and what they say publicly is critical to its success. Hundreds of dollars in promotional effort can be irreparably damaged by something as simple, and avoidable, as a station staff member being rude to a listener or potential client on the telephone.

## Moral Dilemmas

Radio promotion managers face complex ethical questions on a daily basis. Is it all right to target diary keepers or potential telephone respondents with promotional activities, rather than target everyday listeners? For example, is the on-air promotional tag “K109-Write it down” intended for all listeners or intended to influence diary keepers? What about the tag line: “Remember the time you’ve spent listening to Dr. Laura?”

Some stations design specialty merchandise products like refrigerator magnets and coffee mugs for use in the kitchen (where most Arbitron dairies are filled out. Are stations that alter their formats to sweep audiences across quarter-hour breaks acting ethically? Is it unethical to announce that the time is 20 minutes after the hour when it’s only 19 after in an attempt to alter quarter hour ratings?

Some stations purposefully attempt to sabotage their competitor’s promotional efforts by stealing station slogans, by sending their station van to their competitor’s remotes and community events, or by engaging in other efforts designed to confuse listeners as to which station is sponsoring which event. Competitive strategies, sometimes called gorilla marketing, tempt some station managers during ratings periods. What would you do if you were asked to spearhead such activities?

What ethical issues are involved when a station announces plans to drop turkeys on a shopping mall just before the Thanksgiving holiday (copying the WKRP episode mentioned in Chapter 1)? The accompanying on-air promos (for an Indiana station) said “Turkeys will be hitting the sidewalk like bags of wet cement.” Immediately, regional and local newspapers, local television stations, and even one national television network responded by covering the promotion; citizen groups formed to gather signatures protesting the event; local and national organizations of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals became involved. All the while, the station had planned to drop only paper turkeys on the shopping mall. The paper turkeys contained coupons for a free Thanksgiving turkey (or a discount on a turkey) and were part of a sales promotion with a local grocery store chain. Is this an example of an effective publicity strategy or poor ethical judgment?

More clearly fraudulent are station contests that have been rigged so that current or potential clients (or client’s friends or relatives) will

win. Often contest prizes seem innocuous, and there are so many winners of something every week that who wins hardly seems to matter. What would you do if your general manager asked you to rig a circus promotion so the crippled six-year-old child of the station's largest client could be "Circus Queen for a Day" ? If the station announces that the winner will be randomly chosen, the FCC will not look kindly on a sham.

## Summary

Listeners' perceptions of a station's image are often more important than actual listening behavior. Diary-keepers and telephone respondents can seldom record or remember accurately all their radio listening and often respond in ratings surveys with the name of the station that represents the image with which they most closely identify. Successful promotion managers research these listener perceptions and keep them in mind when creating and executing all station promotions. Radio audience promotion involves acquisition, maintenance, and recycling strategies. External media should be used to achieve acquisitive goals while internal media (on-air) will achieve retentive goals. The kinds of contests, giveaways, and other promotions that will be most beneficial to the station depend on the station's format, AQH ratings, cume ratings, and TSLs. Merchandising, direct mail, and telemarketing are having increased importance as radio promotional tools. Sales promotions, often involving contests and giveaways, are crucial to the success of most music-format radio stations.