

Holland Cooke Newsletter • June '19

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PROMOTION: ON-AIR, OFF-AIR, ON-MESSAGE

This month's Special Report begins on page 2.

“No one wants nuance. We want white hats and black hats.”

U.S. Senator Ben Sasse (R-NE); author, “Them: Why We Hate Each Other – And How to Heal” (St Martin’s Press)

Yes, your consultant was a young high school English teacher...until the hypnotic VU meter lured him away to broadcasting. Though I can no longer assign reading, I do highly recommend a book that -- if you work in Talk Radio -- will touch a nerve, and draw a road map. In this newsletter I’m turning in MY book report...on-time!

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“One company could control everything a listener gets to hear in any given market.”

KeepLocalRadioLocal.com web site by the musicFIRST coalition, which advocates for artists getting paid for airplay.

The FCC’s web site explains: “As required by Congress, the FCC reviews its media ownership rules every four years to determine whether the rules are in the public interest and to repeal or modify any regulation it determines does not meet this criteria.”

- In musicFIRST’s view, “big broadcaster conglomerates supported by the National Association of Broadcasters are lobbying the Trump administration to weaken the Local Radio Station Ownership Rule.”
- And it warns “in smaller markets, we could end up with one company owning all the stations, deciding unilaterally what content listeners hear.”
- And the site includes a form for submitting Public Comments.

Battle lines are drawn, as NAB opposes musicFIRST’s fundamental mission, requiring stations to pay artists for AM/FM airplay. Radio has always paid composers, via ASCAP, BMI, SESAC. But not performers – who make their living...performing – and benefit from airplay exposure. With big corporate owners’ stations gagging on debt incurred during Consolidation, this new expense could fundamentally upend music radio’s business model.

And not every corporate group wants to loosen ownership rules.

- Those seeking relaxation ask to cap the total number-of-stations a company may own in a market, as opposed to capping the number of FM stations. Those opposed fear for AM stations’ continued viability.
- But most of Salem Media Group’s stations are AMs. Its Public Comments caution that “without the current restraint on the number of stations a local owner may hold in the same service, it is possible that in a few short years an entire sub industry within broadcasting -- religious radio -- which now thrives on the AM Band, will either be consolidated into groups which have no inclination for religious programming, and/or will become inaccessible to small market America.”

So both sides preach what too few stations now practice: local programming, what NAB President/CEO Gordon Smith called “broadcasters’ unrelenting commitment to always be there for their communities” in his NAB Show opening keynote. With most broadcast hours now robotic/syndicated/voicetracked, stations that fulfill that mission will be conspicuous.

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Promos 101: Your On-Air Message

Nothing we say on-air can add listeners. Because the only people who hear promos are already listening.

On-air promotion should accomplish two things:

1. Add Time Spent Listening by explaining why and how to use the station again another time.
 - That will move-the-needle quicker than even a bunch of expensive TV spots or billboards.
 - Think of it this way: Your listeners already know you and use you. And with promos, you're "buying a spot schedule on your own air," the most-efficient medium for reaching your own listeners.
2. Enhance recall. I'm not against ear candy, IF promos convey the essence of stations and shows. But be careful that cute, self-amused imaging doesn't obscure the message.

Remember "It's a Charlie Brown Christmas?"

That muted trombone when the grown-ups spoke? That's how many radio promos sound to real people.

- What's with the barking or puking or sinister announcer delivery? And why is it always a man? I believe his name is Bill Balls. No wonder actors are doing the voiceover on so many national spots. Gene Hackman used to do United Airlines, then Matt Damon took over. Jon Hamm does Mercedes Benz, Tina Fey does Walgreens, that's Julia Roberts on the Nationwide Insurance voiceover, and John Goodman and Donald Sutherland are doing lots of spots... because they don't sound like typical announcers.
- And those 70s-sounding whizzers? And that voice-in-a-box EQ cliché? Too much imaging sounds like an imitation-of radio, hokey even to grown-ups who are heavy users.
- Are your promos over-produced? Often when I hear announcer and sound bites intercut, they're too tight. It all just runs together. Too-loud background music obscures the message further. And be subtle with sound effects. Those sea gulls are supposed to sound like the beach, not a landfill.

Is your station's imaging boastful? Or benefit-laden?

A station I often hear pronounces itself "The News Leader." Why suggest to the listener that there are other news stations?

It also claims to be "The Station of Record," a designation no authority has actually bestowed. Besides being false, this claim sounds dated. The Internet has made users the authority. When we can read online reviews, movie critics and Consumer Reports, etc. are old school.

Station-centric claims ask listeners to care how we are doing. Instead, help how they're doing. Promo copy is listeners' instruction manual for using the station. Don't squander it telling people that you think you're mighty.

Worst promo I hear most often?

"If you missed Biff & Bev in-the-Morning, you missed..." It's a donut: produced open and close, with an aircheck clip in the middle.

- I don't think I have ever heard such a promo that caused me remorse for missing the show being touted. Often the clip makes the personalities sound self-amused.
- The listener can't act on this message. This morning's Biff & Bev show is gone.
- You send diary keepers a dangerous subliminal message: that they DIDN'T listen. Heck, we want to fool them into thinking they did listen!

Instead:

- Talk about the NEXT show.
- Use "you" and/or "your" as-early-as-possible in copy.
- Offer an unambiguous benefit statement, something listeners will realize from listening, i.e., what they'll take away from hearing tomorrow's guest, what they can call-in-and-win, anticipated topics.

Does station promo copy contain unintentional put-downs?

Common misstep I hear in News/Talk stations' imaging: Meaning to give comfort that the station will keep listeners well-informed, promos say "LISTEN AND LEARN," or offer that listening "WILL MAKE YOU SMARTER."

- Language like this can easily sound condescending. People don't tune-in to get educated. They listen to cope, because you accompany and entertain and inform and guide them.
- So, instead, sound enabling, by expressing benefit statements in listener language. "WE'VE GOTCHA COVERED, FIRST THING IN THE MORNING, AND THROUGHOUT YOUR BUSY DAY" says we've-got-your-back, without risking the implication that you-need-to-be-smarter.

Promos 201: Your Off-Air Invitation

One of radio's enduring and painful ironies is that we sell advertising, but many stations DO none...which advertisers notice. And, conversely, clients view stations that do promote as "big;" and they feel that our off-air promotion supports the schedules we've sold them.

Attrition is a fact of radio life.

So we cannot just mine our internal cume, without inviting new samplers. Every day, people:

- Move into the area...
- Move out of the area...
- Age into of the demographic...
- Age out of the demographic...
- Change jobs, have children, or experience some other routine-altering experience...
- Are born...and die.

Adding cume (listeners) should yield more Average Quarter Hours (listening). Or, as retail advertisers might say, "If you get more people into the store, you'll probably hear the cash register ring more." So promotion is imperative, to keep the stations top-of-mind, to keep "driving shoppers into the store."

It's not just about the money.

If shoppers don't like what's on the shelf, you won't hear the register ring more. And some stations squander thousands of dollars -- sometimes hurting themselves -- making mistakes you want to avoid:

- Promoting a product not ready to be sampled. You never get a 2nd chance to make a 1st impression.
- Offering a vaguely-stated message, possibly risking confusion with another station, or confusion generally. Some GMs are curious when I suggest putting the word "radio" in billboard copy.
- Using inefficient media: Often stations can trade for over-the-air TV. Paying cash? Would cable deliver more bang-for-the-buck? Including where cable takes it, a TV station's footprint is probably bigger than your radio station's, so you're talking to viewers who can't hear you. The News/Talk/Sports stations I work with often use News/Talk/Sports cable channels, on systems well-within the pattern. Billboards? Advertisers notice them! Street-level Poster boards might be a better value than big Paint or digital boards over the Interstate, because it's...the Interstate. Many who see 'em don't live here.

You've heard the old gag that many of us "have a great face for radio." And many GMs gag at the cost of slick syndicated TV spots. You might -- as advertising guru George Costanza would say -- "Do the opposite."

Rip off an idea we've used at several client stations, what I call "the Marcel Marceau technique." You will see it demonstrated in the short video "WHAT IF you did a spot like this?" in the right-hand column at HollandCooke.com.

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4 IDEAS IN 3 MINUTES

1. **Commercial copy tip: "Emotional messages out-sell rational messages" two-to-one. Done right, this "soft sell" approach can reduce price sensitivity, and create an enduring sense of brand differentiation.**

Dan Hill Ph.D., referencing London's Institute of Practitioners of Advertising – reportedly the world's largest database about Sales results.

2. **Malaprop Alert: "undoubtably"**

Unquestionably, you mean "undoubtedly."

3. **Your iPhone will charge twice as fast in Airplane mode.**

Lifehacker.com

4. **Hat-tip: Forbes magazine:**

Edit Ruthlessly

Somebody ~~has~~ said that words are ~~a lot~~ like inflated money - the more ~~of them that~~ you use, the less each one ~~of them~~ is worth.

~~Right on.~~ Go through your entire letter ~~just~~ as many times as it takes. ~~Search out and~~ **A**nnihilate all unnecessary words, ~~and~~ sentences—even ~~entire~~ paragraphs.

Malcolm Forbes
("How to write a business Letter
OR MAKE A SPEECH")

LAST MONTH:

- "The Podcast Consumer 2019," my short-version notes of recently-released Edison Research.
- Digital Delusion! My #1 one take-away from the 2019 NAB Show in Las Vegas.
- Sales reps: THE FIRST question you should ask a prospect. Page 2 in the May newsletter.
- Miss that issue? Email me at newsletter@hollandcooke.com
- Not receiving this FREE newsletter each month? Just ask! Same address.

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Them: Why We Hate Each Other – And How To Heal

If U.S. Senator Ben Sasse (R-NE) didn't describe himself as the second-most Conservative member of the Senate, you might not guess which political party he's in. And he acknowledges that his refreshing curiosity makes him an outlier: "Liberals and conservatives no longer believe the same things, we don't understand how our opponents believe what they believe, and we soothe our lonely souls with the balm of contempt."

Yes, blame the media.

"The leading programs are orchestrated by executives and personalities who understand well that there's real money to be made in helping people keep their fears and hatreds aligned." The senator observes that "the storyline is simple: Liberals are evil, you're a victim, and you should be furious."

It's all about clicks and Quarter Hours of listening and viewing, and technique is not subtle: "Hannity tells a lot of angry, isolated people what they want to hear. And he has the delivery down to an art form."

The author's media savvy is impressive; and his deliberate, thoughtful account of how-we-got-here demonstrates an objectivity missing from the daily digital drumbeat.

Both sides do it.

"The great divide in American life is between Fox and MSNBC – the rhetorical homes of the political right and left. Often they aren't even reporting the same stories. When they do, the coverage is so different it's hard to believe that they are describing the same set of facts."

It's just human nature, Sasse reckons: "Emotion trumps data." It's what research nerds call Confirmation Bias: "People filter-out most information that conflicts with their presuppositions or desired conclusions."

And technology has thrown gas on the flames. The author echoes an irony I've heard from experts I've interviewed on my TV show: Social Media has made us less-social.

"Our crisis isn't really about politics. It's that we're so lonely we can't see straight – and it bubbles out as anger."

Commuting between the Washington swamp and his heartland home, the Senator sees, and listens intently to, "a country of increasingly disconnected people sitting around watching news that riles them up."

When you read this book, and I hope you will, expect to feel like you too are back-and-forth between two places; because, as Sasse puts it, "where there is demand, supply will emerge. And it turns out that 'contempt' is big business."

Are we saving the world? Or saving the radio station?

In a recent Talkers magazine column, I predicted that "America will survive. Meantime Rush Limbaugh affiliates can prosper." And I recommended a strategy which, in elevator speech fashion, is "Carpe Trump: PANDER."

ICYMI: <http://www.talkers.com/2019/01/21/monday-memo-carpe-trump/>

Not just pertinent to the noisy political climate, and how shamelessly media can exploit it, Senator Sasse's book offers a wider-angle shot about life which you will find uplifting.

"You have to outwork everyone. Whenever I showed up on a movie set, I already knew my lines and everybody else's."

Actor, comedian, author, cable news talker Charles Grodin. What else have I heard lately? Turn the page...

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SOUND BITES

"If anything, you read this and you're like: 'Wow, it's pretty impressive all the things he's done in his life.'"

"Fox & Friends" host Ainsley Earhardt, regarding The New York Times report that Donald Trump amassed ten figure financial losses in the 1980s and 1990s.

"Fox News is a hate-for-profit racket that gives a megaphone to racists and conspiracists – its' designed to turn us against each other."

Presidential candidate and U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), refusing to appear on Fox News Channel.

"Mr. Sanders is a real contender."

Karl Rove Wall Street Journal op-ed, noting how Bernie Sanders' Fox News town hall appearance pulled "around 2.6 million viewers – nearly twice as many as his February CNN town hall – making his appearance the most-watched election event so far in this cycle."

"Seriousness and calm would be nice, and after the past few years would serve as a welcome counterpoint."

Former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan, in her weekly Wall Street Journal column: "There is an unarticulated wish out there to return to some past in which things were deeply imperfect and certainly divided but on some level tranquil, and not half mad."

"What can we find for you?"

GREAT line H&R Block's founder asked the viewer in TV commercials, for decades.

- Does commercial copy you write for retail advertisers offer as-engaging an offer?
- In recent years the company defended against do-it-yourself tax software by offering FREE preparation of shortform returns; to get customers in the door, where agents could demonstrate the worth of up-selling to itemizing deductions and other longer-form work.

RIP Henry Bloch – who spelled his company's name "Block" to keep it simple – and grew his business to some twelve thousand offices.

"Why do you think a can of Coca-Cola is worth 25 cents more than a can of Safeway cola? It's not because of the Coke ad you saw last night or last week. It's the ones you have seen your entire life."

WHY advertisers should always be on-air, from "Marketers Are From Mars, Consumers Are From New Jersey," by Bob Hoffman, <https://adcontrarian.blogspot.com/>

"I'd rather run hour after hour of locally-produced income generating programming than have to air a single minute of any infomercial."

We'll call him "Mike," a iHeart PD, who wrote: "My regional sales manager wanted to fill my weekends with paid infomercials (Purity Products etc.). We know those programs are unlistenable, they never update the shows and they are cume and TSL killers."

His solution? "I had listeners calling me who wanted to do their own shows. Right now I have six 30 minute or hour-long programs on the weekend. They are all paid. Only one of the programs is political. The others cover a gamut of interests: starting your own business, movie industry reviews and interviews, attorney, real estate, lifestyle etc. The shows are not slick, but they are authentic and they are connected to our local community."

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AND ABOUT PODCASTING...

“Any piece of glass that can render video was something we had to build our products for, and ultimately give customers a choice.”

Matt Strauss, Executive Vice President, Comcast, interviewed by The Wall Street Journal about how cable companies' apps are making content available on phones and tablets and PCs, in the manner radio stations are feeding Alexa and smartphone apps, and other non-transmitter touchpoints.

“The long-term trend here is that everything linear [programming that starts and ends at a predetermined time] dies and everything on-demand wins.”

Barry McCarthy, Chief Financial Officer of Spotify, which, The Wall Street Journal reports, “recently acquired a trio of podcasting companies for around \$400 million.”

“We see exponential growth with user engagement in the content, not just on our platform, but in the marketplace generally.”

“Momentum is strong for podcasting, so much so that we have already seen examples of podcasting personalities and content even migrating to television.”

Chris Brown, EVP Conventions & Business Operations, National Association of Broadcasters

“Staff of ‘The Ron & Don Show’ was notified 11 minutes after their final show ended Jan. 10. Bye-bye, no explanation, no comment, leaving listeners baffled. But now they’re back.”

The Seattle Times, reporting that fired KIRO-FM afternoon team Ron Upshaw and Don O’Neill will debut a podcast and real estate partnership.

“What Ron and Don are doing makes sense. Podcasting is a great way for radio broadcasters with a following — and they have a huge one — to reach their fans efficiently and independently.”

Talkers magazine publisher Michael Harrison, interviewed by The Seattle Times:

“As far as the real estate goes, talk show hosts are among the greatest sales people in the world. If you sell on the air, there’s nothing wrong with selling off the air and putting years of goodwill and community credibility to work for you and the economy. Obviously, they are living in the real world. I applaud their grit.”

“TOTALLY JUST LIFTED SOME BRICKS FROM MY HEART. CAN’T WAIT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! You two are SO BELOVED. I’ve been in Ron and Don mourning since January.”

Facebook post by “Caity from Seattle.”

“We have no comment on Ron and Don.”

Ryan Maguire, KIRO-FM Director of News and Programming, “who [the newspaper reports] made the decision to not renew Ron Upshaw’s and Don O’Neill’s contracts.”

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