



## Habit? Or Caricature?

*By consultant Holland Cooke • 04/25/13*

You've heard the term "First Occasion?"

It's one of the newer nerd buzzwords, referring to a listener's first media experience of the day. When Don Draper walked the Earth, this wasn't even a discussion. The clock radio would jangle sleepyheads into gradual re-animation.

Now? BE HONEST. Do you look at Twitter first? And, hey, you work in radio!

Now? Many people don't even have a radio in the house. Oh there's one there somewhere. They'll rummage for it when the lights go out. Then, using the Flashlight smartphone app, they'll rummage through drawers for batteries.

Broadcasters who still fund local content sure do deserve to take a bow after stepping-up when the fit hits the shan. We were First Informer alrighty. But why settle for medium-of-last-resort? Be must-use day-in-and-day-out.

### **AM/FM radio is playing defense, at best.**

You've read the research. Smartphones are, literally, within arm's length, physically closer to the user than an AM/FM receiver.

Thus the imperative of brand-extending to the new platform. Not just simulcasting on-air programming to a stream that inserted PSA repetition renders unlistenable. Fashion useful branded content for delivery on that device, inveigling back-into listeners' modern day media consumption routine.

People are extremely busy, physically, mentally. By "people," I don't mean retirees, the callers Talk Radio lets past the screener. I mean people with children-of-any-age living at home...retail uber-consumers...the people local advertisers want to see pulling into the parking lot.

### **Busy people are the ballgame.**

Their lives are a blur. They spend lots of time in-car. "Car" = radio-on-wheels, still, even with an Aux jack.

Unlike their children, these people grew up with a radio habit, and thinking radio was cool. So we snicker when competing stations do the radio caricature.

- Imaging is station-centric and boastful, Bill Balls barking through reverb, or that EQ that sounds like he's in a box.
- Music stations seem to think they're special by doing "commercial-free" hours or "The No-Repeat Workday," or pronouncing their work "the best mix." Listeners already D.I.Y. that, on other devices. Some stations I hear in my travels proclaim themselves "Your Official At-Work Listening Station." Who bestows that august designation, the governor? Must've been quite a ceremony.
- Talk stations? Talk about a caricature! Pompous voices presume rabid interest in politics, and damn "the mainstream media" that Sales reps are claiming the station to be. Rather than the dialogue that can make Talk Radio jump-out-of the dashboard, it's too often monologue you wouldn't want to suffer in a carpool. Yet carpool-habitual use is precisely the goal.

### **Articulate – heck, OOZE – benefits. Real benefits, not clichés. And deliver, dammit.**

Regardless of format, most stations merely brand their traffic reports, rather than actually auditing content to ascertain if it's helpful enough to be habit-forming.

Music stations: You're curators. Music has been commoditized, and listeners can manipulate it without you. What makes your delivery of it special, engaging, fun, habit-forming? Invest in that, and you'll be habit.

Does your station's imaging merely describe a station? Or does it quickly convey why someone should listen, and when? This is more than a nuance. Obsess on it, and Time Spent Listening will improve, via more occasions-of-listening from existing cume, mathematically a quicker way to grow share than by spending to attract new cume. You need billboards and TV commercials less than Quality Control. Sweating the small stuff IS worth the effort.

Smartphone users now tell each other about apps the way listeners talked about radio stations circa Don Draper. Be THAT special.

*Read more at [www.HollandCooke.com](http://www.HollandCooke.com), and follow me on Twitter @HollandCooke*

See also:

- **Where Radio Fits: Radio's Strengths In The Media Landscape**  
<http://www.radio-info.com/2012/09/26/where-radio-fits-radios-strengths-in-the-media-landscape/>
- **Big 2013 Consumer Electronics Show, Big Implications For Radio**  
<http://www.talkers.com/2013/01/11/big-2013-consumer-electronics-show-big-implications-for-radio>
- **NOT "The Future:" Radio & TV Have Already Been Re-Defined**  
<http://www.talkers.com/2013/02/13/radio-house-of-cards/>
- **2013 Talk Radio Breakthrough: Actual Conversation?**  
<http://getonthenet.com/newtone.html>
- **Smerconish: Canary In Talk Radio's Coal Mine?**  
<http://www.talkers.com/2013/03/11/smerconish-canary-in-talk-radios-coal-mine/>