

AGGIE Life

THE BATTALION

No Requests, PLEASE

Album sales, not government or DJs, responsible for broadcasts

JASON BENNYHOFF

The Battalion

Deciding what is played on the radio is a lot like voting, but in this race, votes cost money.

While radio station playlists may seem to be decided by advertising executives looking to make money, corrupt DJs or the Federal Communications Commission, there is a system that gives radio programmers the outline for their daily playlist.

Terry Hunt, program director for Aggie 96, said most radio stations use a system called Soundscan to help them decide what songs to play. "Soundscan is a system that keeps track of what albums are selling in stores,"

Hunt said. "The service is provided to radio stations by record companies, and you can find out what is selling nationwide or in your local area. This helps when picking out songs to play."

While Soundscan is a national service, Hunt said, stations can do localized research to find out more about their listeners' tastes.

Hunt said the local research that goes into deciding which songs will get air time depends on the radio station's format.

"Most stations have a heavy, medium and light format," Hunt said. "Songs are played in an order by how hard or soft they are on the listener. When we get our songs into a regular rotation, we can do some research to see how they are doing."

"There are two kinds of local market testing we can do," Hunt said. "The first is auditorium testing. In this, we call about 500 people and probably come up with about 150 who fit the target audience. Then we have them come to an auditorium where they listen to song clips and tell us what they think of them."

Hunt said auditorium testing is much slower and more expensive than its high-tech alternative.

"The better way to test is online," Hunt said. "You just ask people to go to the station's Website, say, between Tuesday and Thursday, and have them listen to clips and rate them online. This is a lot more cost effective because we do not have to take people out to do interviews. It is also a lot less painless because we might have up to 500 clips to listen to,"

and, online, the people do not have to do them all at once."

However, these market testing methods are not for every radio station. Mario Juan, an employee of KBMA radio, said his station relies on more intuitive methods to pick its tunes.

"A lot of (music selection) is based on our gut," Juan said. "We listen to the new records that come in and try to pick the next big one."

Juan said, despite the instinctive nature of his station's music choices, he also uses industry publications to select popular tunes.

"Music industry sources play a big part in our music selection," Juan said. "We particularly use trade magazines to see what is new and climbing the charts."

Despite a radio station's need to attract a large audience in order to gain advertising revenue, Hunt said, advertising does not play a large part in the selection of music.

"Our target audience at Aggie 96 is women between the ages of 25 and 54," Hunt said. "So our advertising caters to them. However, radio stations pick their format and then the advertising follows. Advertisers pick stations that will appeal to their targets; for example, you will not find ads for Clearasil on a station that plays (classical) music for older people."

Despite complaints that the Federal Communications Commission interferes in radio business, Michael Wagner, a supervisory attorney for the FCC, said his organization does not have any impact on what radio stations play.

"We just license radio stations," Wagner said. "Our job is to allocate bandwidth for radio stations and resolve complaints that stations' signals are interfering with each other. That is as far as our influence on radio goes."



PATRIC SCHNEIDER/THE BATTALION

(Left) Darren Taylor performs the Afternoon Stretch for Mix 104.7; (top right) Rhino broadcasts live from GTE for Mix 104.7

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