



Amplification

From Dave Shakes

Pump it up. Amplify it. The way to thrive on the fragmented entertainment dial is make your small fragment bigger than it actually is. Sacrificing width and narrowly focusing a radio station isn't the end goal. It's just the beginning. The end goal is to amplify what's left into something bigger than its natural value.

I first saw this principle at work when I interned at KFRC in 1980. Dr. Don Rose sailed his private boat from San Francisco to Hawaii for a family vacation. They pumped up his week-off into the greatest voyage since Christopher Columbus. A fleet of ships escorted him out of the bay. Short-wave radio provided daily reports on his progress. If done today, they'd have a satellite geo-finder plot his progress on the station website. Amplifying his vacation kept fans involved with the morning show when he was off.

A savvy morning man is Gary Craig at TIC-FM. He tells a dirty joke every Thursday that makes you laugh. He pumps it up by airing a woman they call "The Laugher of East Hartford". She has an insanely long, cigarette smoke-drenched cackle that won't stop until she's gasping for air. It makes the show even funnier. Amplify the laughs.

At B-96 in the early 90's we wanted to amplify an Eddie & JoBo benchmark called "No Panties Thursday". That's the day you don't wear underwear to work and proudly call in to report said fact to The Killer Bee. How to make "going without underwear", even bigger? We paid your parking at the Madonna concert if you were flying your underwear from the car antenna as you drove in. Thousands of cars flying their bikini briefs in the breeze amplified "No Panties Thursday" and put Eddie & JoBo on the map.

At The People's Station KMEL, we wanted "the people" to feel involved with the stage. So a stage banner "dancing man" design was put on T-shirts. The sea of concertgoers looked like part of the stage art design. Amplifying the stage design linked listeners to the performance.

I recall an aircheck of M. Dung back in his early days when he twistedly amplified a simple pledge drive by threatening to vomit on the air if listeners didn't pledge money. They didn't cough up...so he did. I believe it was that "puking delivery" that led him to get mornings at KFOG. (I figure this anecdote amplifies my point in a way that the Hits Editors can appreciate).

Mike Marino also had little resources at The Planet in Houston, but used amplification to spark listener imaginations. They had a “Planet Staff Party” for employees and lucky listener winners. Of course it was a very good artist showcase meet and greet, but selling it as “staff only” amplified the image of a fun “inside, exclusive” event.

Programmers are strategic these days. They separate stations within clusters, and eliminate anything that doesn't build core TSL. That's good. Amplification begins with removing “noise” in the signal. But finish the job. Don't just air what's left after you've eliminated clutter, pump it up, make it bigger. Amplify what's left into a cohesive single “big stick” that grabs the listener's imagination, and win by making the competition appear obsolete.

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