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NEW DAY FOR RADIO

Current conditions present fresh opportunities

I will start by saying that I miss the old days of radio. It was fun being a PD in the 70s and 80s. It was competitive, creativity was encouraged, and there were plenty of perks. There was also enough money kicking around so there was no need to sweat the small stuff. An old friend often reminds me that I flew him into town to interview for an *overnight* jock position. He got a nice hotel room for the night too. At the time it was business as usual, but it's not anymore. No budget for that kind of thing. The new rule is, let's see if we can find somebody who lives nearby. In the 90s, as a programming consultant and researcher, client contracts often included programming consulting plus one to two research projects a year. Not so anymore. Like it or not it is a different world today for radio.

Managers are under so much pressure to trim operating expenses that marketing, research, promotions, and staff have been cut to the bone.

What is left is a handful of overworked programming people doing their best to make stations sound as if they are still the fully staffed operations they once were. But it is not working. Quality is down, the edge is gone, and listeners are catching on.

There is another way, and it starts with three easy steps: 1.) Stop trying to do more with less, 2.) Accept conditions as they are, and 3.) Act in accordance with the new reality - that means a new approach using the resources you have.

Of course, you know best when it comes to your situation, but here are a few thoughts. If there is a station in your cluster that is only marginally competitive due to signal limitations or other factors, consider a jock-less niche format. The Jack format had a nice run and there are other examples of stations that continue to do well today.

The key is embracing the "no-jock" position as a positive point of differentiation rather than using voice-tracking to sustain the illusion of "live" radio with lukewarm results. The right programming consultant working with one tech-savvy contact at the station can make it happen.

If you're a big player in your market and want to keep it that way, meet with your programming consultant to review the services that are being provided. Are recommendations and guidance as actionable today as they were when staffs were larger and budgets bigger? You may want to re-tool the arrangement and hand off some of the behind the scenes responsibilities.

Music scheduling, for example, can take ten hours a week or more of your PD or MD's time. Library updating and management can also be passed along. What about your station's imaging strategy?

Creatively packaging and promoting the brand essence of your station with liners and promos is critically important and time consuming. Will your programming consultant work directly with imaging producers to get it done?

The point is this, if you believe that radio is a people business use your people where they can be seen and heard by listeners and clients. Find another way to get the time consuming behind the scenes work done. If you don't have the resources needed to run a fringe station the way you'd like, don't overwork a barebones staff or over-rely on part-timers and beginners - step back, re-think and create an exciting niche music format that's "not live" by design.

Things change, stuff happens - think different and make the best of it.

Dan Hayden
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HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO: *Rather than trying to sustain formats meant to operate with full programming staffs with a bare-bones staff, re-think the operation so it can easily be run with 1-3 people. And this is where we can help. Click [GrowStationOnShrinkingBudget](#) in the Memo section at [danhayden.com](#)*