

"What Is Driving Your Music Meeting?"

by Gary Gorton

The amount of money spent on music research is astonishing. On average, a top-20 market station is spending *more than \$60,000 a year* on callout research. It is not only expensive, but in the past has been rigorous and difficult to manage, and not regarded as the powerful tool it could be.

A recent industry event featured two competing alternative stations showing how they make decisions in music meetings. Surprisingly, music testing was mentioned only once. At the end of one of the videotaped meetings, the PD turned to his computer and said, "Let's see what callout has to say."

The other station didn't even *mention* music research. It appeared that all their decisions were made by their on-air personalities during monthly meetings. In order for new music to get in the rotation, it had to be played for this group, who voted without being told the title or artist. All of this data was tabulated by the APD, and then taken to the PD once a week for his review and decisions. On occasion they would go to an outside consultant as a sounding board and bounce ideas for new songs or rotation changes off them, but it was a tossup whether they would use the advice they got.

Although the first station was more scientific in its approach to the music meeting, neither gave much credence to music testing. But why not? It's a fact of radio life: All Program Directors want to gain share. The only way to do so is by appealing to the listening audience. Program Directors know this. They might not be making certain, however, whether the music testing they are using is done properly or weighed heavily enough in the station's decisions.

Listeners First!

It's one of the golden rules of working as a PD or Music Director: Just because you don't like the music doesn't mean it won't appeal to your listeners. Therefore, it's important to start their music meetings with this information, then fill in with the opinions around the room -- not the other way around. Not only should you ensure music testing is a major factor in the decision-making process, it is also important to verify the results that you get are accurate and auditable. In effect, you need to "know what's in the sausage."

Furthermore, PDs should make sure that all song test results make sense, and when they don't, find out why. Not only does having the underlying data for every song score help to better understand the results, it is a great way to actually get to know your audience. Who are they? Where do they live? What stations are they listening to? And which one is their preferred station? This data can also be a goldmine of information to help market your station more effectively.

Music meetings should be driven by research, and research should be taken seriously. When talking to stations that understand the value of music testing, one common thread appears: They are rated 1, 2 or 3 in their markets. It turns out that radio is not so different from other industries ... the companies that spend time getting to know their customers and make an effort to deliver a product that meets their needs will achieve the greatest success.

After all, if music is not meeting the listeners' needs, then who is going to listen?

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