

"The news-tip is probably our most effective gimmick"

tive returned to Tennessee for prison term, reform school escapees held for stealing automobiles, Iowa murder arraignment, Davenport barmaid cleared of jail break connection, Kansas State Prison warden refuses to resign, evacuation of Pennsylvania families in face of spreading chlorine gas fumes, Eisenhower budget director on post office financial crisis, hearing of newsmen's protest of State Department's ban on travel to Red China, Senator Sparkman on foreign aid, Izvestia on U.S.-Israel plan to construct new Mediterranean port, Saudi Arabian warning to Israel on Gulf of Aqaba, Israeli report on Jordan crisis.

Here is how Todd Storz describes his news policy:

"We try to lead off with a local item. Our view is that the average person is more concerned with the auto accident that happens around the corner than with the United Nations. I came to this view from newspaper readership studies which show that interest in local news is higher than in national or international events.

"However, we definitely do cover national and international news, though we usually give it headline rather than detailed treatment.

"We don't emphasize sensation as much as we did at the beginning. But we still go in for what would be more correctly described as human interest, as well as Hollywood material. As with music, our policy is guided by what the audience wants to hear."

A disk jockey recalls that when an irate listener would call in complaining of a sex story that the station had carried, he would reply: "We are the only station in town that does not censor the news."

A highly valued part of the local news operation is the news-tip. The station pays from \$10.00 to \$25.00 to any listener whose news-tip has been used. Every employee whose phone report is used on the air gets an extra ten dollars in his pay envelope.

"The news-tip is probably our most effective gimmick," says Storz. "We began it in 1949. In our smallest market, Omaha, it will produce five to eight stories on a quiet day. It can produce up to fifty and sixty a day."

The news-style is staccato, "telegraphic," with an air of the exciting and up-to-the-minute.

The newscast is introduced—always five minutes before the hour—and signed-off with sound effects, beeps, news machines, typewriters, and so forth, in keeping with the tone of excitement. It is preceded by a musical theme with lyrics calling attention to the news show.

An important trio of news items are time, weather, temperature. These are given seven or eight times an hour, always at station breaks. Accompanying them are frequently brief reports on driving conditions.

SOUND EFFECTS

"We are not running an austere operation," says Todd Storz. "We try to showcase it, we try to put 'color' in our sound, just as 'color' is being used to showcase television."

Sound effects are used for newscasts, promotions, commercials, and a great deal of time, money and effort go into their preparation. The straight local live commercial is now a rarity; it is more often dramatized, or otherwise dressed up for sound.

To achieve a sense of the ever-new and fresh, Storz reports, "we try to do something new with sound each month. One month we'll start the news with news chimes ticking away, the next month we'll go in for gongs or bells. The point is, it will sound different from the week before.

"In the same way, we try to change frequently the sounds we use in our commercials." The musical theme is employed throughout the schedule as a basic element of the over-all station sound. Singing station introductions, and sign-offs are used for each disk jockey and newscast. Long used in radio, the singing introduction is by now almost universal.

PROMOTION

The most controversial part of the Storz formula is the one that has received the widest publicity. In the bag of attention-getting tricks he calls "promotion," it is often claimed that the give-away is the true reason for the Storz success—that without it, his station would be nowhere.

Before discussing Storz's own views on the subject let us look at the record. After the Storz station reaches the top or near it, does it stay there or come down when the first great promotion wave is over? Are there any instances of swift success when the major promotion was not used?

An examination of the Hooper rating charts on page 89 will clearly show the following:

1. The Storz stations seem to have staying power. WHB has been the Kansas City leader for over two years. WTIH has led in New Orleans for two years; KOWH has held the top spot in Omaha for over five years, is now being challenged; WDGW has been a strong second in Minneapolis-St. Paul for a year.

While other rating services may show different audience shares, there can be little question that these stations have made strong impressions in their markets.

2. WQAM, Miami, within 90 days, rose from second place in the morning and fourth place in the afternoon to first place in both periods—despite the fact that no give-aways were used, under the pledge Storz made to the FCC when applying for the Miami license.

Imitators have tried Storz stunts, often with success but all too frequently these successes have been short-lived.

What really aroused broadcasters' ire was the notorious \$105,000 buried treasure hunt that Storz conducted in Omaha and Minneapolis-St. Paul. Clues were given daily on the air, for ten days—in which time the cities went mad.

Such stunts have created traffic tie-ups, sent motoring tearing into staid libraries in feverish search for hidden treasure, and caused other types of mayhem not always foreseen by the perpetrators. Whether this type of promotion is evil, harmless, or helpful, has been subject of heated dispute for years. Here is how Todd Storz looks at it:

"Promotion is a very legitimate advertising method. It is of service and interest to the listener, and has proven successful in television and in building newspaper circulation.