

Storz: "The days of 50% to 60% share of audience are limited"

To McLendon, this "newspaper of the air" approach to radio is the greatest of all of his many promotions. "The best promotions are the occasional big local news stories that come our way. We promote 52 weeks of the year, not just during a rating period."

THE COMPETITION

When a brash young upstart invades an old and fairly quiet domain, the veterans at first tend to refuse to recognize his existence. When it becomes clear that the old order is being destroyed, the veteran may move to defend himself, sometimes too late. This has been happening fairly often during the past few years.

But not in Minneapolis. Knowing that Storz was heading for a twin-city operation, the undisputed leader for many years, WCCO, studied his operations and decided to fight back. Other stations in town joined the fray. WDGY manager Labunski tells what happened.

"In Minneapolis, they were waiting for us. In Kansas City, we had used the \$25 news-tip successfully. WTCN started it just before we came in, so we didn't use it. WCCO began a Saturday Top 40. WLOL went into a Top 40. We went ahead with ours on the grounds that you can't imitate the name of the show—ours features the name of the disk jockey. WLOL also used the Lucky House contest. The first result was an increase in the total amount of popular music being aired.

"In the same 10 days during which our \$105,000 buried treasure contest ran, WCCO ran a \$250,000 secret word contest. We announced we would run the secret word, so that listeners wouldn't have to listen to WCCO. WCCO ran long phrases, like 'WCCO is the best station in Minneapolis.' We carried them. WCCO vaulted us into the big-station category. They invited us into the club."

The gulf that separates the newcomer's thinking from that of the older, solidly established broadcaster is evident from this statement of F. Van Konynenburg, v.p. of WCCO, in connection with the battle between the stations.

"This was one case in which we were familiar with the pattern they were going to establish. We asked ourselves: are we making full use of radio? Have we missed any bets in terms of the audience? We did not make any radical changes in order to compete.

"Is radio really as different today as people say? We studied the independent operations pretty sharply—you always do this when you are top dog. We are necessarily concerned that our approach might be old-fashioned or archaic. The figures show that the fare we offer is not unpalatable.

"The tendency for all the stations was to devote time to contests. We had the Big Bill Cash contest, and we ran our own promotions. But we have a strong sense of responsibility to the community. We have enjoyed acceptance for many years; few can boast our share of audience. We respect our audience, and they respect us in turn. We have always emphasized a really conscientious treatment of news and public affairs. Anything we do has impact, because of the size of the audience. The purpose of our promotion is to keep people aware that we aren't in a rut."

"WCCO," comments Labunski, "has long understood the local approach."

Starting from a base of unusually strong acceptance in its area, and a brace of top-notch personalities like Cedric Adams, WCCO has been able to maintain first place in the Hooper race against a fast-climbing WDGY, now a strong second after having risen from sixth place.

One of the most intriguing of the competitive battles has been waged in Todd Storz's home town of Omaha, the scene of his first radio triumph. After leading the field since the end of 1951, KOWH had just been nosed out of first place in the morning by KOIL and was losing ground to it in the afternoon, according to the latest Hooper report available. Todd Storz claims that other rating services show him still ahead—an ironic turnabout, since competitors have frequently challenged his own Hooper claims in exactly the same manner.

KOIL co-owner Don Burden openly declares: "We fought fire with fire." Not only did KOIL take on the KOWH program pattern—though it uses a somewhat broader base of musical selection—it also jumped headlong into the promotional war.

"Last May we gave away a \$30,000 dream home completely furnished. Storz started the \$105,000 deal in answer. We used the Mystery Santa Claus, with clues given for six weeks before Christmas."

KOIL programs news every half hour, but follows the Storz logic in supplying "what the people want." Burden claims that "between the two stations, we wrap up 70% of the audience. The basic reason is the top personalities."

Other managers study techniques

As a result of KOIL's successful combat, says Burden, the station is getting two to three personal and telephone calls per week from managers in other markets curious to know what it is doing.

It should be noted that KOIL has a natural advantage in facilities in that it is a full-time station, while KOWH is a daytimer only.

In Milwaukee powerful competition prevented the McLendon station, WRIT, from rising above fourth place, except briefly, in the Hooper listings during the period of his ownership between March, '55 and Dec., '56.

As becomes a realist, Storz recognizes that imitation and aggressive competition were inevitable. "I think it is pretty clear that the days of 50% to 60% share of audience are limited, as stations come to resemble each other in the sound they put on the air. The competition is bound to get keener."

Storz is now looking toward the bigger markets for his future station efforts, and there may soon be an answer to the question of whether he can make the grade in the big city. He is willing to concede that the major markets' polyglot population and different levels of culture and taste may make it theoretically impossible for him to apply his pattern there as he has in the past. But deep within, he refuses to acknowledge the possibility. "After all," he explains, "you must have faith in what you're doing." END

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