

## **RADIO STUDY: FM RADIO**

Birmingham, Alabama, hardly a stronghold of highbrowism, has 65 per cent FM set saturation because two stations present baseball. Local and regional sports coverage involving both high schools and colleges have pointed the way to profits on many FM stations. And in rural areas, where AM reception is bad, AM-FM stations, by continuing their coverage on FM after dark, have made friends for the medium and sold sets.

A change is about to take place in the programming of the 23 stations which use FM to sell background music to supermarkets, drugstores and bars. They have been forced to use their primary channels for programming directed at the home, according to an FCC directive which they are still fighting. They must go multiplex, which allows them to use secondary channels for service functions. Multiplex will not only allow the presentation of stereophonic music, but it will allow the selling of other services than functional music.

### **FM network would answer many problems**

But a considerable number of FM broadcasters see the formation of an FM network as the answer to their financial problems. They see the unity created by such linkage as the answer to both their sales and program problems. The network concept is not new to FM. Numerous network schemes have started and sputtered to an ignominious halt. Others have been formed with far from spectacular results.

WQXR-FM, whose Rural Radio Network lost out, is spearheading another one, the Northeast Radio Network. The twelve-station hook-up, which covers ninety-five per cent of the population in New York State, can be bought either in combination or separately.

One of the more ambitious plans for a network has been proposed by the Triangle station chain. It is trying to organize 22 coast-to-coast stations in a tape network which would provide 28 hours of programming weekly between the hours of 8-12 midnight. Time would be sold in half-hour units in which two commercials would be allowed, plus an opening and closing billboard. Three Westinghouse stations and a large number of other FM outlets owned by major station groups have been invited to join the tape network.

Network proposals have run up against difficulties in the past. Many FM station operators want to continue programming their prime time periods. As pointed out, others have many of these hours sold to long-term local advertisers. They are not about to bump them without ironclad guarantees. But whether or not Triangle creates a network, there seems to be a chasm in FM that can only be closed by such an organization. Also necessary to the medium is a national association that would embrace many of the more forward-thinking of the FM operations. Among the cities, only Los Angeles has its own FM Association.

### **FM is likely to grow and grow**

That the medium has manifested such staying power in spite of its difficulties, self-imposed and otherwise, speaks well for its future. Out of much of the confusion surrounding the medium, some clarity is bound to emerge. New and important investment sources are bound to try to tap the FM vein. The advertiser cannot afford to forget about a market where listeners average an income of \$8,660 yearly. These listeners, of course, not all intellectuals, might be to broadcasting, what the *New York Times* Sunday magazine section is to print.

To listeners, FM still offers a greater variety of programming because so many AM stations duplicate their shows. FM still offers better sound, sound that is being further improved by stereo; better reception, especially in fringe areas and in cities where traffic as well as TV set radiation present important interference problems. With the AM band so heavily overloaded with stations, the reception delivered by FM is apt to become even more vital through the years. And so the conclusion must be that in spite of difficulties, problems, false starts, overselling, underselling and a host of other retarding factors, FM must, of necessity, take up a more important place in the broadcasting spectrum in future years. END

*The most comprehensive study available on FM is "What Makes FM Succeed" which can be purchased from Lyman Allen, Laurel Drive, South Lincoln, Mass. Mr. Allen recently completed a survey of every FM station in the United States as part of a research project for the American Civilization Department of Brown University.*

*Reprints of this study are available at 25¢ each. Bulk rates on request.*

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