

Radio – The great communicator

This is radio.

As we know them from our kitchen, from the bathroom and every where else in the house. Until recently we all worked from the assumption that every household in Europe had about five or maybe six radios spread out in the house.

We used to think at that as a lot. Probably bearing in mind, that after all – it is only a few decades ago that every family had to gather around the only radio in the house – to hear the only radio channel available.

Now,

This is a radio – it's digital

And this is also a radio – which you can use for talking.

And this is a radio – useful to write on – or if you want to search information on the Internet.

And this is a radio – you can watch TV on it.

And this is a radio – where you can keep your food.

We can also look at it in another way. Welcome inside a modern house. It might be a little bit futuristic. But we are almost there. Welcome in the hall – it looks like a door bell, but it is a radio and here is the kitchen it looks like a fridge but it is a computer – and a radio. And here is the bathroom with plenty of radios, the two kids rooms, two more rooms, and everywhere you will see radios. Finally you have all the mobile gadgets. Because now a days, nobody would dream about leaving the house without something with a radio in it.

The digitalization of radio has reminded us that the strength of radio is its low costs and that it can be present and used everywhere. And that is exactly what makes the radio the great communicator. One of the features that the listeners welcome is the ability to choose to a greater extent what to hear, when to hear it – and where to hear it. A radio is not just a radio any more. Radio is changing and we and the listeners are changing our view on the programmes and channels that we broadcast.

Aided by digital production and the possibility of packaging and distributing different formats, can we as broadcasters now regard channels as far more specialized formats for far more specific situations than previously. The range of choice available to listeners has grown enormously, and the choices available are also much better. For five years ago the broadcasting corporation that I represent broadcast just about 40 000 hours a year on four FM channels. Today in 2004, the number of channels reaches almost 20, and a total of 160 000 hours. The listeners can receive this on any platform available.

The point is that “digitalization has moved radio from a single distribution system to a multi-system medium utilizing terrestrial, satellite, cable, internet, digital television, set top boxes, mobile phones and other wireless devices.” The words are not my own; you’ll find them in this terrific report from EBU’s digital strategy group. And it coincides perfectly with the way that we should regard radio.

We have to try to organize the formats according to listeners and their anticipated listening situations: digitalization of radio allows us to present listeners with alternatives, opportunities and products they did not use to have access to. Let me give you an example:

In Denmark, as in many countries, the strawberry enjoys special status. After the cold, dark winter the first strawberry is welcome evidence of summer. So it is no surprise that the arrival of the first strawberry receives coverage that is almost as intense as an impending royal wedding.

But although most Danes would like to know that the strawberry has arrived, the way they want the news dished up varies according to their listening situation. If they are on their way to work in the car it’s fine to hear the whole story as to where and how the first strawberry was picked; the price per kilogram and size can be painted in broad strokes of the brush and we need interviews with the grower, the greengrocer and the shopper. That is how the story is served on FM in the morning. But if you are at work and you’re taking a short break, you’d prefer the slightly truncated version. You can get that from your computer. And if you’ve just landed at some airport abroad on your way to a conference – like most of us last night – you merely wish to be updated on the most important news, and to hear the joyful strawberry story in its shortest possible form. You get it via DR news phone service.

In the digital age we can make the listening situation determine the format. Via recycling, repackaging and digital distribution we can now offer listeners radio in more formats and on a greater variety of platforms than ever before.

It can be done very easily. DR are now organizing our production and – most importantly – refining the way we format our products on the principles I have indicated. We have witnessed an increase in the number of listeners, a rise in the number of hours broadcast and cost remaining nicely at a low level.

Let me round off with another quote from the report from the digital strategy group: “The digitalization of radio will bring many benefits. Through more choices and increased interactivity digital radio can bring the listener anything – anywhere – anytime.” This will secure Radio’s unique status as the most widespread and most used mass media. This will secure that radio will continue to be The Great Communicator.

Thank you,

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