

Learning from the media's best storytellers



HzS G d

“Fighting to stay free”

#174...May-June 2013

And now, ladies and gentlemen...

...we find ourselves at a crucial crossroads. Is competing with commercial-free, interruption-free, talk-free music-based “off radio” by doing virtually the same thing except keeping the commercials a dependable long-term strategy for radio?

If you answered “Yes” - really? Really? Ahem...REALLY?

It feels like anyone who has spent some time in and has been able to write about radio believes it's not on the right path. They believe it's not just about playing a lot of music but also communicating, entertaining and connecting with listeners. In fact, given everything out there vying for a listener's attention, it's about all of those more than it's ever been.

While I'm certainly no expert, I do feel there's something to using the art of storytelling to make radio stand out. Heck, that's an idea that goes back to day 1 of radio. I know I wasn't there, but I also know what made radio such a powerful medium was having a “big voice.” Granted, that was easier to do when a radio was the biggest thing - and the only electronic medium - in the house. But after nearly a century of reinventing itself several times over, radio still excels when the girl or guy inside the box can rise above all other elements and give a message that won't resonate via any other medium, one that doesn't need pictures, video, files or anything else. A good story, joke, tip, opinion or just a friendly voice stands by itself.

The beauty of this is, a great sliver of live communication can happen and succeed, start to end, inside of 20 seconds or less. That's clearly important if you're limited to talking over the instrumental opening of a song (which these days is often a lot shorter). Although most of the time these days, opportunities for great, succinct communication on radio go wasted.

So it's striking when the media's best storyteller inside of 20 seconds is a six years old. As in the girl telling the story about being a werewolf in the AT&T television spot (<http://youtu.be/l61LjTwME7w>). And that's TV. How did things get so bad that a first grader can do on TV what a DJ can no longer do on radio?

If you've seen the other AT&T commercials set in the classroom, you know it gets even worse for radio. Another kid's bit about a big screen TV in a tree house comes close to rivaling the werewolf story. Yes, the expressions on these children's faces does add something to these commercials' effectiveness, but just the same, the idea that these kids can tell a riveting story in such a short space should be a lesson for radio.

One of the great things a radio personality can do that can't be done as effectively on TV is tease a story to keep listeners waiting for the payoff. One top 40 DJ who recognized the value of that back when dinosaurs ruled the earth was Casey Kasem, who before "American Top 40" was born teased stories about upcoming artists at KRLA et al. That's probably why AT40 came to be and what made it required listening for so many. As a kid focused on the numbers and the songs, I admit I never thought that much about the added value every time Casey said "Coming up..." but even then I knew that AT40 was bigger-sounding and more feature-driven than any local countdown.

So if radio won't take a lesson from the AT&T classroom kids, perhaps it can from Casey. Or, dare I suggest it, another entertainment medium that's displayed a mastery of the art of both storytelling and the tease: the comics. Specifically, *Prince Valiant*. That's right. A medium with no sound and pictures that don't move, that's lower tech than radio, excels in telling a story and teasing every Sunday strip. Proving perhaps how simple it is to do this.



Drawn by the artist drawing the Prince still known as Prince

We've barely scratched the surface, but hopefully the point has been made: regardless of format, radio's edge over other media remains live communication that entertains, tells a story in some shape or form and keeps the listener wanting more. Now let's get to work.

ZE PLUGS...

- * "The CHRONicler" in Thursday's *Billboard Top 40 Update* (subscribe free at <http://www.billboard.biz/newsletters>)
- * "The Rest Of The Week..." Saturday 6am-1pm and Sunday 10am-3pm ET at <http://wrnradio.com/streaming/>
- * Follow me at <http://twitter.com/#!/@Restoftheweek>
- * Friend me on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/richappel7>). While there, if you like the weekend show, join the group "Fans of The Rest of the Week with Rich Appel on WRNJ" (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/323136847786834/?ref=ts>).

Click.

.....

Past editions of Hz So Good can be seen at <http://www.60s70s.org/HzSoGood>