

WHY RESEARCH?

PATH-
FINDER
RadioReport

January 2004

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You don't know what you don't know until you find out – and then it's like, “*geez, who would have thought!*” That's what research can do for you. But enough about research - at least for the moment. Many of you are involved with clusters that include one or two market leading stations; often referred to as *motherships* – along with a couple of under-performers in sore need of direction. I'd like to focus on the under-performers because they represent great opportunity in the coming year. Since these stations are not big revenue generators it's difficult finding dollars to invest in them – but as Bruce Springsteen once wrote: “...*that's where the fun is*” (well, actually it was “...*oh but mama, that's where the fun is*”).

Most managers acknowledge the importance of audience research. However, when it comes to growing those seedling stations, the likely action-step is not research, but a fad format, big money contest or advertising campaign. In other words, a shot in the dark. I am here to encourage you to save your contest and advertising dollars, take a pass on the format-of-the-month – and invest in research aimed at identifying a roadmap to a successful and sustainable market position. Yes, it can be expensive, but a programming strategy rooted in solid information about the local market and its listeners is far more likely to lead to profitable results.

Invest research dollars wisely. Buy only what you need. Adopt a guerilla-strategy mentality toward acquiring information. Big sample format finders and market studies are not always necessary. Targeted studies using smaller samples of carefully screened respondents may be enough to provide the directional information that is needed. Combine mini-perceptual studies with music tests. Quality local music testing is available on a cash/barter basis. Online local music testing linked to your station's website is becoming increasingly reliable and useful – and that too is available on a barter basis. One provider that I know of will test your current category songs on your audience in exchange for sharing the test results.

And finally, use local research data to “educate your gut” about the specifics of your particular situation. Rather than filing away research reports, keep them handy and refer to them when making day-to-day decisions concerning programming, marketing and branding issues. Oh, one more thing, programming strategies that are based in local market research inspire confidence among managers and program directors – and that is something that the jocks and promotions staff can sense. As a result, they execute with confidence and stations build momentum faster. My advice is this: research first – then adjust/change programming – then promote/advertise. Do so, and the day will come when you find yourself thinking: “*geez, this was a better way to go than that hot new Slammin' Softies (or whatever) format!*”