

## **Community Radio Broadcasting and Positioning**

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### **Abstract**

*Community radio in Australia comprises 340 independent not-for-profit organisations filling niche market segments. However, they often strongly compete with high profile mainstream commercial sophisticated broadcasting companies. For community radio to successfully compete means developing a clear market position to assist their program development, management system and promotion format. This paper explores the status of community radio organisations in Australia and examines the market research process adopted by one organisation to test and validate its market position. Both listeners and non-listeners of the station were sampled. Analysis indicated that for the community radio broadcaster they were well positioned by the cognitive understanding of their constituent members. This paper presents, tests and affirms the market position held by the organisation and the results provide affirmation to the programming content and broadcast structure. In addition it assists in filling a research gap as it relates to positioning and community radio organisations.*

Key words: Community Radio, Family Radio, Positioning

### **Community Radio and Family Radio**

The radio broadcast network in Australia operates through three major groups comprising national, community and privately owned. Of the three, community radio is a relatively new cousin to the broadcasting family and is characterised by three main factors. Firstly, they are not-for-profit organisations. Secondly, their constituent community largely determines the programs and content. Thirdly, they engage non-professional volunteers, yet nevertheless usually with highly skilled operators, who support management and broadcasting tasks.

Community broadcasters offer a range of services primarily to Aboriginal, ethnic, visually impaired, specialist music, gay, campus, religious, educational and some 'generalist' groups. Since their inception in the early 70's they have expanded to encompass 190 permanent community radio stations, plus 150 aspirants ([www.cbaa.org.au](http://www.cbaa.org.au)). Community radio covers over 50 major towns and cities, engages in over 80 languages, uses substantial local programming, content and accounts for up to 48% listenership ([www.business.vu.edu.au](http://www.business.vu.edu.au)). In the metropolitan regions over 30% of the population are aware of the presence of community radio and 4% are categorised as regular listeners (Van Vuuren, 1998). Government funding is only received by groups such as those linked to Aboriginal and ethnic communities and to new licence recipients. In 1999 community stations received a total of A\$4 million in government funding (Broadcasting Inquiry Report No.11, 2000). Although community radio is a capital-intensive industry it employs over 10,000 paid and voluntary staff members (Van Vuuren, 1998). However, the percentage of paid versus voluntary staff is unknown..

Family Radio (FR), a non-profit organisation, is regulated through the Broadcasting Services Act, 1992, the Australian Broadcasting Authorities and the Australian Competition and

Consumer Commission (Maynard and Johnson, 2000). The FR station, founded in 1974, serves 'whole-of-family' music and topical interests in the Brisbane metropolitan region. They operate from a large commercial premises, utilise extensive broadcasting technologies and engages seven full-time staff plus 40 dedicated volunteers. The support base consists of more than 2000 financial subscribers and sponsoring organisations. As business, especially small business, are not clearly defined the percentage division of subscribers is not certain.

### **Family Radio and market positioning**

Family Radio uses the positioning statement of the 'positive alternative'. This guides its operational platform including content selection, programming and presentation. The term of positioning was popularised by Ries and Trout (1982). They saw positioning as:

A piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution, or even a person...positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to mind of the prospect (Kotler 2003).

The essence of positioning is sacrificing with a willingness to give up something in order to establish a unique position in the market place. This is achieved by focusing on one or more of the seven variables comprising: product attributes, price and quality, use or application, user, product class, against competitors and or product benefits (Anderson and Vincze, 2004). Many marketers consider developing only one central position. The object is to create a unique selling proposition commonly known as a USP (Reeves 1960).

The USP for FR is the 'positive alternative' position statement and in general it adopts a positioning framework against competitors whilst simultaneously positioning itself on product benefits for its listeners. The USP is underpinned by a common philosophy in the organisation which embraces seven elements: limited use of commercials, avoidance of crude language, no crude sex type contests, no explicit sex talk except in an educational and informative framework, no cynical announcers, no songs with demeaning and violent lyrics and finally avoidance of announcers who talk too much. Specifically, it sought answers to a series of research questions.

### **Research questions**

To examine the validity of the positioning statement the following research questions were constructed.

#### **Research question 1**

Do general commercial radio listeners experience high levels of dissatisfaction on issues related to the number of commercials, use of crude language, crude contests, explicit sex talk, cynical announcers, songs with crude lyrics and announcers who talk too much?

#### **Research question 2**

Do FR subscribers, with respect to commercial radio listening, experience high levels of dissatisfaction on issues related to the number of commercials, use of crude language, crude contests, explicit sex talk, cynical announcers, songs with crude lyrics and announcers who talk too much?

### Research question 3

Is there a substantial difference between the general radio listeners and the FR listeners with respect to the levels of satisfaction related to research questions one and two?

### Research question 4 – adjunct research question but related

If the listenership of commercial radio were aware of an alternative to their traditional commercial station that embraces the FR ethos, would there be a desire to switch?

## **Methodology**

Senior management of FR in conjunction with one of the authors of this paper designed a questionnaire that was based primarily on a series of five and three point Likert scale questions with interval descriptors. As there was no specific literature to guide the questionnaire development extensive round table discussion and reflection was undertaken. A more sophisticated services marketing research design using the disconfirmation paradigm was considered, however, a simple design was considered more appropriate due to the relatively unsophisticated management style of station personnel in interpreting results. A pre-test of 20 individuals indicated that clarity of the wording was not a problem. Due to shortage of space the questionnaire is not included in this paper, although the survey questions can be deduced from the output descriptors as detailed in the results section.

The most appropriate research method, given time and cost constraints, to examine the research questions was a quantitative survey to be able to gain generalisations and to test the research questions using a mix sampling approach. The first group, the non FR listeners was sampled through a mall intercept method using a SRS at a shopping centre. The second group, the FR listeners sampled were through a phone survey using SRS from the sample frame of the stations subscribers. The rationale for using a mixed sampling technique was that the shopping mall would most likely capture the non FR listeners. By contrast the phone survey would capture the FR listener, thus in both cases providing high response rates.

With respect to the sample size, based on past experience of one of the authors in similar surveys a sample size of 200 was deemed adequate for each group. However, it was decided that, should the sample size produce an error range of greater than 5% at a 95% confidence interval at the conclusion of the research, the survey would be extended. As indicated below the post hoc calculated error rate was 3.9% . The survey was conducted within the period of one week to avoid maturation effects (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2000).

## **Survey Results and Analysis**

The data was entered into Statistica<sup>®</sup> firstly to determine the accuracy of the sample size, secondly to examine data normality and thirdly to examine the output data in order to test the research questions. The data revealed a 3.9% error at 95% CI using the method of Tull and Hawkins (1990). Thus the sample size was deemed suitable for this application. The data revealed no outliers and the distributions were considered at an acceptable level given the robustness of the tests that were to be used (Hair, Bush and Ortinue, 2000).

The combined gender distribution indicated that the FR subscribers and non-listeners were 40% males 60% females. With respect to age, the mean for non-listeners was 35 with a

standard deviation of 17.9 and a range of 13 to 88. By contrast, the age of FR subscribers had a mean of 36 with a standard deviation of 11.8 and a range of 12-73. No statistical inference is made beyond the FR subscriber group having a smaller standard deviation indicating the narrower age range of the group.

The seven questions, surveying attitudes of the FR and non listeners to general commercial stations, were based on five point Likert scales ranging from 1 = far too much, to 5 = far too little. Results are shown in table 1.

**Table one: Responses to seven ethical questions for radio listeners**

Descriptors	FR Subscribers			Non Listeners			P value
	Valid n	Mean	SD	Valid n	Mean	SD	
Use of crude language	157	1.69	.80	195	2.81	.91	<.001 *
Crude contests	155	1.71	.77	193	2.66	.89	<.001 *
Explicit sex talks	153	1.75	.79	196	2.60	.91	<.001 *
Excessive Number of commercials	155	1.78	.71	197	2.03	.86	.004 *
Songs with crude lyrics	154	1.88	.83	196	2.84	.88	<.001 *
Cynical announcers	154	1.89	.76	191	2.61	.84	<.001 *
Announcers talking too much	156	2.13	.81	195	2.23	.89	.283

\* Variables for listeners and subscribers are significantly different at the .05 level

In relationship to research question one and two, there is sufficient evidence of relatively high levels of dissatisfaction with commercial radio in the seven identified areas. No value reached the scale of three representing an 'acceptable' level.

With respect to research question three there was a substantial difference between six variables at the alpha level of .05 related to each group. However, there were no statistical differences between the groups in relation to the variable, 'announcers who talk too much'.

Research question four related to the willingness of respondents to change from listening to their normal choice of commercial stations to an alternative with the operational values of FR. Only responses by non-FR listeners were recorded. The variables were based on a three point Likert scale ranging from 1 = very definitely change, to 3 = make no change. The results are shown in table two.

**Table two: Responses to 'switching'**

	Valid n	Mean	SD
A station with no more than 5 mins of commercials per hour	194	2.02	.78
Announcers that don't talk excessively	194	2.13	.75
Station that encourages a high Australian content	192	2.30	.78
A station that uses non abusive and non threatening announcers	190	2.45	.9
A station that uses non vulgar and non abusive language	192	2.47	.69
A station that uses positive music that is does not contain crude lyrics	186	2.50	.72

The data showed no values below the mid-point of 2.0 and with a mean across the six variables of 2.31. The data demonstrated a low propensity to change to an alternative with the values adopted by FR.

### **Discussion and implications**

The evidence suggests that the positioning framework resonates with the target market audience. Although there is evidence to indicate that the 'positive alternative' concept creates a sound broadcasting framework for its subscribers however, it is not necessarily effective for non-FR listeners. There is no evidence to suggest that on average non-FR listeners would be prepared to move from their traditional commercial radio channel to one that embraces the programming criteria created by the 'positive alternative' option concept.

The evidence suggests that both the non FR listener and the FR subscriber target group echo a relatively high degree of disenchantment with traditional commercial radio in the area of the seven ethically related variables. This is especially true of the average FR subscriber. This should act as an indicator for the commercial radio stations to improve their presentation quality. However, the data indicates a reluctance of general radio listeners to engage in a switching activity even if a more desirable and more ethical stand were offered by an alternative station such as FR. The lack of action taken by the commercial stations and the public may be due to other factors including: the station's lack of awareness; the possibility of the public being desensitised by the gradual erosion of social values; the exercise by most stations acting in some degree of moral concert. It is also possible that traditional commercial stations may arouse such feelings of brand loyalty that they override disenchantment.

In the broad sense of community broadcasters and marketing practitioners this study has only focused on a few aspects of consumer behaviour that positioning and switching attitudes. However, it has provided a basis of understanding that can be fed back into issues such as image creation, programming and even pricing. Some aspects of the data are measures of confirmation whilst others indicate the need for further research.

### **Limitations and Areas for Further Research**

The instrument could have been improved by more extensive examination of the questions, through qualitative work and through developing an instrument using factor analysis. In addition, the research could have been improved by allowing qualitative responses to open-ended questions. Further, more attention and extension work could have been gained through additional application of demographic and sociographic data. This would have provided additional informative research data.

In conclusion, it is suggested that community radio serves an extremely useful function to specific sections of society as these sectors are seldom serviced by traditional commercial broadcasters. Unfortunately community radio stations serve very small market niches, have very limited resources and seldom engage in market research. This paper has provided some insights into one community radio venture and has attempted to find insightful answers to a number of research questions that relate specifically to FR. The research shows fairly high levels of disenchantment in a specific number of areas of commercial radio broadcasters.

However, the evidence suggests that, although the programming format and image created by FR of the 'positive alternative' actions resonates well with the non-FR listener, it does not impact to the same degree the wider audience. There is little evidence that the general public, even if there was knowledge of the 'positive alternative' developed by FR, are unlikely to engage in switching to a station which uses that concept.

Although there are limitations, the research addresses a number of important areas related to Family Radio. It also serves as an approach for developing a more refined instrument for further research.

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