

Up Your Ratings

Leading Edge Information You Can Use to Increase Ratings,
Get a Raise and Have More Fun

SCR
International

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- www.UpYourRatings.com
- +1.406.388.5309 office
- +1.406.388.5324 fax
- +1.480.370.9822 cell
- scasey@UpYourRatings.com
- Posting at www.UpYourRatings.blogspot.com

Your Brand Equals the Center of Gravity (for successful radio stations)

The center of gravity is a term that some programmers use to talk about the music that best represents the radio station. It doesn't apply to a single song, but rather to the group of music that people share a love for.

Your brand is what you are known to consistently deliver. The path to high ratings is an easier one if your brand matches the natural center of gravity for the music tastes of your target audience.

I usually use the term "center of the page" instead. Other programmers talk about "core sound", or "the hub of the music wheel" or "essence" or "the center lane". All the terms mean the same thing: where the music comes together to best be shared, and which songs do that.

Your brand is the promise you consistently make and then deliver, including about music. If you promise a certain type of music, but you don't play the best representatives of that music – the ones that are at the center of gravity – then you will be seen as making false promises, and your brand image will suffer.

So why do we care?

We want to be known as trustworthy.

We want to be known for something. So people remember to come back and listen again!

About SCRI

Steve Casey Research International specializes in helping stations increase ratings. Our contribution is highly effective research and communications between listeners and the station programming team. We help you obtain frequent and accurate feedback from your listeners.

Most consultants show up with opinions. SCRI brings you leading edge tools. We make available to our clients the most advanced music research tools in radio and over 40 years of experience using and perfecting those tools at many of the most successful stations, in more than 100 radio markets around the world.

We've been honored to provide our help to exceptional broadcasters like the Australian Radio Network, TV2 Radio (Denmark), Mango (India), CanWest (New Zealand, Turkey), Cox (USA), CBS (USA), NRJ Group (France), Chrysalis (UK), Start Group (France), Millennium (India), Primedia (South Africa, Israel), SBS (United States, Puerto Rico), Finelco (Italy), GMG (UK), SBS (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Romania, Greece), RMF (Poland), Sandusky (USA), Juventus (Hungary), Prima (Romania), Clear Channel (USA), Virgin (UK, Thailand, Jordan, France, Turkey and India), AMP (Malaysia), Regenbogen, Big FM, RPR1 (Germany), Communicorp (Ireland), Lagardere (France), MFM (France), Red, Angel, Freedom (Greece) and dozens of other great radio stations around the world.

We can't simply go by music survey scores or sales or even requests. Because these look at each song all by itself. We care about how the songs relate to each other and which songs help define who you are.

We want to know these things so we can program the music. Because not enough songs are "perfect" we have to control the order in which we play the songs, right? We want to play songs that are "brand building" (because they help us deliver our brand promise) every 2 or 3 songs. But there are not enough perfect songs, so between those we play "variety" songs. They aren't perfectly appropriate for our format, but they are popular with many people, and we want to play them as well, so that we are not boring. People like variety. We just do best if we keep coming back to our correct central sound.

Brand building songs, or center of the page songs, or whatever term you use, are easy to determine with SCR music research software. We simply compare each song to see how much the people in the music test all feel the same way about the song. And we limit this concern to the most popular songs. So then, the computer can determine not only that a song is popular, but that the people who like it also are the same people who like a lot of other songs in the music test.

Those are the songs that teach us what the listeners want us to be.

On the other hand, some popular songs are not seen as similar to the other most popular songs, and so we learn that they are not part of the core sound and do not build the brand. Instead, they give the station variety. They can be equally important. We simply must not play too many of those in a row, and forget to give the listeners the songs that they all share a love for.

You understand, of course, that everything is a matter of degree. When I write something like "the songs that they all share a love for" I really mean "the songs that as many of the listeners share as much appreciation for as any other song in the music test". Because there are no perfect songs. We just look for the best songs possible.

Critical Tip: "Your brand and your musical center of gravity must be the same."

To use this information could not be easier. If you simply play the songs that both test well and are the most appropriate for your station a little more often, and if you also play these songs every 2-3 songs and put them at the most important places in the hour, the station will sound amazing. Really. No one thing will improve your programming more than this simple change.

Variety is defined the same everywhere. Variety means a song that doesn't fit perfectly with the format, but which is still popular enough to play.

Unless you believe that people would prefer to hear only the same few fantastic songs over and over and over, then you will want the variety. Maybe these are simply the same kind of music, only less popular. But in many cases, the variety will come from a different music "sound".

As a music programmer you will control the sound. The computer only knows that the people **as a group** don't think the same way about a variety song as they think about the music that is core to your format. Music testing, even with very good analysis, is still only a tool. You still need people to be creative and program the radio station.

You also need to avoid bad testing methods. Small sample sizes. Badly designed samples that don't reflect your true audience. Test methods that are easy for us, but complicated or difficult for our listeners. What matters is finding the very best way to communicate with and understand the preferences of your listeners. Sadly, most programmers, even if they are able to get a music test approved, have no analysis. Only a little number. Not enough! You've got to understand how you're doing in terms of matching your brand and your reputation with the music tastes of your listeners. SCR International can help.

Don't Do "Aspirational" Music Research

I've seen a disturbing trend lately. For the success of your programming and ratings, I'm going to urge you not to make the same mistake I'm seeing more and more stations.

Reflect Reality

The mistake some programmers make is to misunderstand the role of music research.

Music research is a study of people who are listeners, and who have varying degrees of interest in and satisfaction with your programming. It is a study of their opinions that will find the common ground in music taste and find out which songs best support your effort to keep your listeners happy.

Don't Reflect Your Aspirations

Music research is not directly a tool for changing who you are into who you want to be. Your programming does that. Want to go younger? Then study which songs are more popular with your younger listeners and which music genres seem to work with the entire audience but which they appreciate more. And adjust your programming balance accordingly. But be warned. Many stations fail because they try to force a format into a position different from what it wants to be. It is best to pay close attention to where the natural appeal of your music is. Follow it. Don't aspire to change it.

"Rule one: Always test the big songs!"

Make Every Library Music Test List Better Than the One Before

Here are my thoughts about selecting songs to test:

Rule one: Always test the big songs! I believe that you should be trying to put together the very best test list possible.

Those big songs don't really always test. At least not all of them, and not with every demo. Plus, there is always the need to monitor them for burn. If you use a research company that, like Steve Casey Research, does music clustering and fit analysis, leaving out key songs that anchor and define your format will cripple your analysis.

I suggest that the 100 songs that tested the worst in the previous AMT, or up to 200 songs (if there are that many) that tested badly in both of the last two AMTs can be left out. Substitute different songs that you haven't yet tested but have reason to believe will test in the top half of the test.

Tip: If your research gives you some kind of 'fit' information, leave in the odd song that tests very bad but has a decent fit score against Pure Core. That kind of song has a better chance of making a leap in the next test.

Be sure and look at the most compatible music clusters for good clues as to the types of music that you should be mining for additional test songs. *Don't just toss in a song because you play it as spice on the weekends. Believe, for some reason, that it has a shot at the top half of the test.*

If you don't have any kind of cluster breakdown of your music, you'll have to use your own good judgment alone. But either way, look for more music of the type and from the artists that are already working. That rule may not always apply to currents, but it is very reliable when you're looking for more oldies.