

Up Your Ratings

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

SCR
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Music Library Testing: Review of the Basics

Value

Library music testing is valuable because tastes in music shift, songs burn out, competitors introduce new music, and artists fall in and out of favor. Your recurrent and gold library is the foundation that exists so you don't have to play your currents every 37 minutes. It is also the 'glue' that links listeners together through the body of music that they share appreciation for.

There's a lot of controversy over library music testing lately, particularly in the area of gathering data. What methodology should you use? All of the methodology that people have come up with have some strong points. Regardless of how you structure your music test, there are a few things that you *need* to get right.

Music Test Environment

The first critical factor is the test environment. There are about six things that must occur. If they do, the respondents can do their best job of giving you valuable insight into what they want from you.

- The respondents must understand easily what to do and how to do it.
- The respondents need to be able to focus on the task without distraction.
- The respondents need to be able to express how they feel - their opinions - clearly. That would include

burn, familiarity, level of passion, and it probably precludes a really complicated questionnaire.

- The respondents must be able to enjoy themselves.
- The respondents must not become fatigued.
- The respondents must be able to embrace the survey and their participation in it as a serious, important thing.

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.

If these things happen, the results will go well. The big thing here is not to confuse the respondents. Review the plan for your music test. Does it rate well in all six of the above factors?

Sample

The second issue is one of sample. This is a mirror that you'll be holding up for three, six, maybe twelve months. You want a very good sample of your most important customers and then, past that, sample as you can afford. The 'normal' sample design calls for 50-60% of the respondents to listen to your station most, and the remainder to listen most to one of your two closest competitors.

To shoot yourself in the foot the most effective thing you could do is bring the wrong people into the room. If we bring the right people in it's going to be very difficult to confuse them so much that they say that they like a song that they don't really like. With the tiny sample size we're dealing with, we've got to have the right people.

Analysis

The third issue has to do with the analysis. We've found over time that you must pay attention to the fact that songs are not isolated islands. They work together to create some kind of programming vision for the radio station.

When you analyze your music test, you've got to make sure that you fit the AMT results into the programming vision. The programming vision is often the result of a very expensive market study so you don't want your AMT undoing all of the work you just invested in.

The reality that people don't like everything on our station is reflected in their responses to the auditorium test or weekly music survey. And fortunately for us, the differences between people aren't random.

People who feel some way about a Madonna song may be far more likely to have the same feeling about a Paula Abdul cut than something by Genesis or Boston. This is an obvious example. But it illustrates a point: If you are a hot AC, and you just played a Madonna cut, you want to follow it up by something else in your library that is likely to be enjoyed by a different group of listeners than the people who just enjoyed the Madonna cut. In the example above, you would be better off with a Genesis cut than with one from Paula Abdul.

But the above is only an example. Your audience is unique, if only in terms of how much they have been exposed to different songs. That uniqueness is one of the reasons you bother to do music testing, rather

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than rely solely on national averages. But if your listeners who like Madonna also like Paula Abdul, and if those who don't like either tend to like Genesis and Steve Winwood, then they will have told you that through their opinions on the music test.

Positioning analysis, such as my own 'Variety Control' reveals the realities of song clusters in your music test. Armed with this information, your library research can now play a new, expanded role in helping you program the station.

The research can now help you establish boundaries for the station. It can help you see which songs are not only popular, but are also consensus cuts, in line with other songs that appeal to your core audience. And you can see relationships that, if exploited in your scheduling, will give you song to song balance control never before possible.

Fortunately, these days, several of the major research companies are providing some kind of positioning analysis. I like to think that SCRI is the leader in this area. But whoever you partner with, the recurrent and gold library is critical for most stations. So you should avoid using any approach that does not provide you with the ability to position the music to match your programming vision. You should be as comfortable with that as you are with the popularity scores.

More Music Research Basics

Forms

Rule 1: Avoid computer scan sheets whenever possible.

Used by large research companies with a lot of data to process, these computer readable forms help them get their work done quickly, despite a huge number of projects.

But, they do not help the respondents.

The forms almost always look like a test. People don't like tests. They like to express their opinions, but not take tests.

The forms require people to fill in tiny boxes. This causes people to focus on filling in the boxes rather than how they feel about the song.

Taken together, the two problems above are what some research companies that do "dial" tests mean when they say that people hate to fill out written forms.

But there are more problems:

Generally, the research company will pack in 100 songs on every page. That means tiny print. It means lines that are very close together. It is easy to get lost.

Doubt me? Take part in such a test. Sit down and fill out a computer scan sheet yourself. Let me know how much fun you have.

Rule 2: Circle a Number

Forms should consist of a series of columns, clearly identified with the opinion each represents. The music test respondent's answer should then be indicated by circling a number in the proper column. If there are six columns, then the numbers will go from 1 to 6.

They should circle a number because:

It is incredibly quick and easy. Especially if you contrast that to trying to fill in a little box.

If they change their mind, a quick "X" makes it obvious that this is not their answer. They can circle another number. If you fill in boxes, or use an X or check mark, then only erasing an answer makes it clear. But there isn't time for that.

When entering the data, a circled number makes it extremely easy to enter their opinion, using a ten key pad. No other approach makes it easy to enter the data.

"Fortunately, these days, several of the major research companies are providing some kind of positioning analysis."

Rule 3: Portrait, and Lots of White Space

Forms must be set up with a portrait, not landscape orientation. The human eye will scan quickly only within a fairly narrow range. That is why pages are taller than they are wide. Don't fight human physiology.

If you're putting more than 25 songs on a page, you're probably making it too hard for people. Don't crunch lines together. And after every 5 songs, leave extra space. That will help people keep track of their place.

It is sad but true that many radio stations sabotage their efforts to learn from their listeners. They give them an unfriendly and confusing form, and then expect them to think clearly through hundreds of music hooks. You can do better. If you need help, that is part of the service Steve Casey Research offers its clients.

User Generated Content—Getting the Listeners Involved

Radio has long known about and enjoyed the benefits of UGC.

1. Requests.

Since the dawn of commercial radio, music enthusiasts (generally very young music enthusiasts) have wanted the ability to tell us which songs they enjoy and ask us to play them again. Let them call, text, tweet, and go through the station website and Facebook.

2. Countdowns

The "Top 8 at 8" or other "voting" show gives listeners a chance to express themselves and have some small effect on our programming.

3. Call-out

Why do we get so much better response - without paying anybody - to our appeals for listeners to help us with our programming by participating in call-out music and other surveys? Because they want to participate! True, we don't get the response we used to, but relative to other research efforts we do very well.

4. Promotions

Some of the most successful and compelling promotions worked so well because they allowed the listeners to create content.

Highveld, Johannesburg, listeners had to create a rap song and be subjected to it being aired and judged, in order to win tickets to Eminem's movie premiere and a concert in Detroit.

MTV viewers produced and submitted for judging by Madonna a video for one of her new releases.

WLS listeners "sang their way to Hawaii", writing and performing a short song that was supposed to convince the panel of judges that they should be one of those allowed to go along with our afternoon drive team for a one week remote broadcast from Maui.

KZZP Phoenix: Screaming teenage girls could win tickets to a Bon Jovi concert, but only.. if they were able to get their mothers to come on the phone and sing the Bon Jovi song selected by the morning show.

5. More?

No doubt, there are many additional possibilities, and new technologies and media keep expanding the number. Facebook, texting, Twitter. Use them all!