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On-air Program Promotions Insight Study

Final Report

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by Eric Nuzum
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Audience Research Analysis

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On-air Program Promotions Insight Study: Final Report

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Prepared by Eric Nuzum for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting
April 1, 2004

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A full repository of project details, reports, presentations, audio samples, and articles is available at <http://ericnuzum.com/oppis>.

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This project would not have been possible without the support of the radio staff at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Their trust and enthusiasm for this project is both humbling and inspiring. Further, I would like to thank the members of my advisory committee (Sheila Rue, SR Sound Programming; Scott Williams, KBAQ/KJZZ; Bruce Warren, WXPB; and Israel Smith, IS Marketing) for being so generous with their time, expertise, and good advice. This project would have not been nearly as effective if it weren't for their patient and diligent guidance. Sincere thanks to Ira Glass (host of *This American Life*) for sharing his creative and effective promos made specifically for this project. Also, thanks to Pam Anderson of WKSU for her amazing copy editing skills and to the programming staff at WKSU for tolerating me while I worked through these ideas and concepts (and often recruiting them in the process).

—Eric Nuzum
April 1, 2004

Section 1: Executive Summary

The on-air promotion of programming has great potential for public radio. **If the promotional inventory at public radio stations were aggregated, its value would exceed \$85 million.** That's the equivalent of having an advertising budget of \$85 million to market our programs to listeners. However, this opportunity has not been harnessed or exploited to its potential. The primary reason for this disconnect is a lack of standards and best practice benchmarks at both the network and station levels. Literally, no two stations in public radio promote programming the same way.

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that well-constructed messages, presented to listeners frequently enough to be remembered, successfully convey information that is understood and comprehended by a large percentage of those who hear them. Research also proves that broadcasting messages fewer times has dramatically less impact.

Public radio stations promote too many programs simultaneously. As a result, stations cannot air promos enough times to be assured that reasonable numbers of listeners hear messages enough times to retain all of the information.

The suggested practices resulting from the *On-Air Program Promotion Insight Study* can be framed under three main headings: the three R's of program promotion. They are:

- Reduction
- Repetition
- Real content

"Reduction" has two definitions: On the macro level, it means talking about fewer things; on the micro level, it means simplifying messages. In this project's survey, **responding stations indicated that they air a weekly average of 10 different promos for unique programs or dayparts.** In order to air promos often enough for listeners to retain and recall the information they contain, stations should jettison most of their different program promos and focus promo inventory on two or three promotional priorities.

"Repetition" also has two meanings: increasing exposure and reach, and breaking away from the broadcasters' "weekly" mindset. As a way of calculating the best reach and frequency of on-air promotion, **Optimum Effective Scheduling** is public radio's gold standard. Yet, despite near universal agreement about the system's benefits, practically no stations use it. In this project's survey, the average program promo airs on a station 8 times, which is approximately one-seventh of what an average OES schedule recommends. Interestingly, with the exception of *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, stations have a tendency to promote locally produced programming more often and more regularly than national programming. At many stations, local programming is promoted twice as often; however, this is still far below any acceptable measure of effectiveness.

Most of the promotion in public radio is “episodic” or “program-specific.” In other words, it’s more common for stations to promote a program’s specific installment or episode rather than the program itself. **There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that this isn’t an effective way to promote programming.** At worst, it changes the message too frequently; at best, it may be too subtle. In either case, message recall erodes quickly when there is no reinforcement over time.

Furthermore, **without reinforcement over time, the impact of the message fades quickly.** Stations should air promos over a period of several weeks, if not months, to ensure that those promos are properly exposed to a large percentage of listeners. Instead of laundry listing content, promos should describe programs in ways that are relevant to the listener by describing the program’s content.

There are some writing and production tactics that have repeatedly proven to aid in message retention and recall. Unfortunately, we should avoid several of the most effective because they do not bode well with PRPD Core Values and are incompatible with the way that most stations present programming. These include: sound effects like “laser zaps,” echo and reverb effects, over-equalization, compression, fast paced or frantic speech, silence, and (in some cases) humor.

Before initiating a promotional campaign, it is wise to take a fresh look at your station’s programming schedule, hour-by-hour results, and loyalty graphs to ensure that you are promoting programming that delivers significant public service, is appropriate for your station, and airs at time that works for listeners. **No amount of promotion will change people’s tastes or persuade them to listen to something they don’t want to hear.**

“Audience building” is not a network issue, it is a station issue. Producers create programs. Stations use that programming to build audience by selecting the right programming, at the right time for their audience, and doing their best to make listeners aware that it is available.

Section 2: Project Overview

The On-air Programming Promotions Insight Study (OPPIS) is a CPB-sponsored research project conducted by Eric Nuzum. On-air program promotional spots are some of the most prevalent programming produced and aired on public radio stations, yet their utility is often debated. With the On-air Program Promotions Insight Study, definitive information concerning on-air program promotional tactics and methodology was researched and analyzed for dissemination to producers and station personnel.

OPPIS creates no new research. Rather, existing data from a variety of disciplines and sources (including radio advertising research, academic studies into audio message retention and recall, and previous public radio-specific research into program promotion) was gathered, analyzed, and applied to public radio's unique needs.

The concepts, definitions, and recommendations contained in this report were gathered from more than 40 different research projects, statistical analyses, and publications on advertising and message retention best practices (a complete bibliography of source material can be found in Section 12 of this report).

Project dissemination

The primary, long-term touch point for the project has been, and will remain, the project's web page, available at <http://ericnuzum.com/oppis>. Since June 2003, **more than 575 unique visitors have come to the page seeking information on the project**, copies of materials (presentations, handouts, and articles), and project findings and reports. Current visitor tracking information for the OPPIS web page can be viewed on demand by visiting <http://extremetracking.com/open?login=oppis> at any time.

Dissemination of information to date has included:

- Featured session at the Public Radio Program Directors (PRPD) Conference (Phoenix, AZ), September 12, 2003.
- Informal conversations and interviews related to the OPPIS project (and its findings) with several dozen network representatives, program producers, and station personnel.
- Two "Thinking" features in *Current* that spotlight the OPPIS results concerning "Reduction and Repetition" and "Optimum Effective Scheduling."
- Featured session on OPPIS during the Music Personnel Conference (Clearwater, FL), February 28, 2004.

- PRPD *NewsWrap* article on OPPIS final findings, scheduled for May and June, 2004.
- Advising to NPR Audience Building Project and resulting promo initiatives.
- Introduction written by Eric Nuzum on the subject of on-air promotion as part of the new NPR program promotion initiative.
- More than a dozen station and network consultations relating to on-air promotion.
- Two proposed sessions at the PRDMC Conference in July 2004.
- Distribution of this report to stations via PUBRADIO and PRADO announcements.

Several other presentations are still being negotiated and, if scheduled, will be reported on the project web site.

Section 3: The Effectiveness of On-air Promotion

Less is more

Public radio stations promote too much of their programming. That statement may seem counterintuitive, but it is true. Station broadcast logs have space for dozens if not hundreds of programming promos during the week, and these log avails are filled with a vast mixed bag of program promos.

The intentions are admirable: Stations are proud of the programming they offer, they believe their listeners will enjoy these offerings, and they want listeners to be aware of programming. Often, stations feel compelled to air so many promos out of a sense of fairness. Just like a parent with children, programmers claim no favorites and want to give every program a chance to be noticed and to succeed. All of these promos add up, but **stations justify excessive promotion by thinking that the more program promos they air, the better.**

It isn't.

The problem is that stations assault listeners with a smorgasbord of promotional messages. **These spots air so erratically, and are often so information-heavy, that they don't resonate with listeners or create lasting impressions.**

The good news is that the solution is simple: **the fewer programs promoted the better. Fewer, more often, is better yet.**

What are on-air program promos?

One of the main problems in the discussion and evaluation of on-air program promotions is over-definition.

Promos come in many different varieties. We call these by many different names. **The PRPD handbook lists six kinds of on-air programming promotion tactics:** Vertical Flow, Vertical Skip, Horizontal Promotion, Diagonal Promotion, Promotion of Special Programming, and O.E.S. (Optimum Effective Scheduling). These tactics can be broken down into two simple categories: forward promotion (vertical flow—also known as “quarter hour maintenance” or short descriptions of program elements, stories, or music coming up within the next segment or hour) and cross promotion (everything else). This project focuses only on **cross promotion**. Forward promotion is an important component of radio programming, but the objectives, rules, and tactics used in forward promotion are significantly different than those of cross promotion. Therefore, forward promotion is not a focus of this project.

Judging promo effectiveness

Do promos work? The true answer to this question hinges on how “work” and the promotional campaign’s “objective” are defined. **Most on-air program promotion campaigns have one of two objectives.** They are designed to either raise the awareness or image of the program and the station airing that program, or they are intended to increase listening occasions.

Before proceeding, there are a few important considerations when discussing the effectiveness of on-air promotion.

First, there is an exception to every rule. When we discuss radio, we are talking about a mass medium—at every station you will encounter exceptions that will not conform to mass behavior. It is possible that a listener could hear one airing of one promo and become a faithful listener to that program—but this is far from typical behavior. Many stations share stories about airing a small number of promos and receiving complaints from a listener who is sick of hearing it. Again, the plural of anecdote is not data.

The second point is that in order to discuss the concepts in this report, we must make the dangerous assumption that the programming we are promoting delivers significant public service, is appropriate for your station, and airs at time that works for listeners. Before initiating a promotional campaign, it is wise to take a fresh look at your station’s programming schedule, hour-by-hour results, and loyalty graphs to ensure a proper fit. **No amount of promotion will change people’s tastes or persuade them to listen to something they don’t want to hear.**

As it says in Audience 88: The worst mistake a station can make is promoting a bad product. I would add that the second worst mistake—and what is addressed in this report—is promoting it ineffectively.

Awareness and imaging

It is important to note that, when discussing a station’s image, we don’t necessarily mean “positioning.” Positioning is how stations set themselves apart from other radio stations and media by stressing their uniqueness. **Awareness and imaging are more statements of what a station is—the elements that make up a station’s programming and unique personality.**

The effectiveness of awareness campaigns is easy to prove. It is easy because there is no action involved. A well-constructed message that is delivered to listeners often enough for them to recognize that message can make listeners more aware of programming. When executed effectively, this type of message recall strategy has been proven repeatedly by research.

For many radio professionals, that’s enough. For them, running programming promos in order to establish awareness of programming is a good enough reason to justify the existence of those promos on the station’s schedule.

Increased listening

The more difficult objective—and much more divisive issue—is airing promos to increase listening to programming. **There are experts in public radio that claim promos can create new listening, and there are just as many who maintain that on-air promotional campaigns are a complete waste of airtime. Actually, they both are correct.**

Those who argue that on-air promos do not increase listening are not using a fair argument. These professionals maintain that it is impossible to prove the promos' relationship to increased listening. This cannot be proven because it is nearly impossible to establish a clear cause and effect relationship. If a station airs on-air promos for a program—and if listening to that program increases—the only thing that has been proven is a correlation, not causation. Those two things are not equal. There are too many other possible causes (such as the programming has improved or news events have raised interest) to *definitively* link the increased listening to the promotional campaign.

That being said, the absence of a cause and effect relationship is not enough to dismiss the concept. **If the programming is right, the promotion message well crafted, and the delivery is frequent enough (and to the right people), the message stands an excellent chance of creating additional listening.**

It's important to note that the concept of "increased listening" can have several articulations. First, it can indicate new listening occasions among members of the station's core audience (who are also those most likely to give financial contributions—and give according to the overall value of the station). Increased listening by core listeners can help solidify the relationship between the station and these important listeners. Secondly, promos can be an important tactic for converting fringe listeners into core listeners by making them aware of all the programming offered by a station that they might enjoy.

In the "Taste and Feel" portion in Section 6, there is an explanation of how WKSU implemented the results of this study to promote weekend folk music programming. During the targeted ratings period (Fall 2003), the book showed a 23% increase in weekly Cume audience and a 36% increase in Average Quarter Hour (AQH) listening during folk music hours.

Section 4: The Three R's of Program Promotion: Reduction

As a framing point for the main findings of this project, I have defined the **three R's of program promotion**. They are:

- **Reduction**
- **Repetition**
- **Real content**

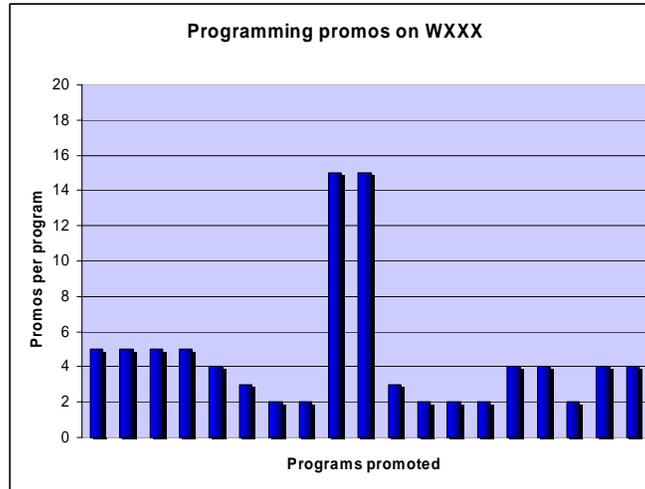
Reduction

Reduction has two definitions: **On the macro level, it means talking about fewer things; on the micro level, it means simplifying the message.**

According to data gathered in the survey portion of this project, **the average public radio station airs promos for 10 different programs or dayparts every week.**

Some stations promote as few as two programs or dayparts, others as many as 27. The number varies dramatically from station to station with—literally—no two stations promoting their programming the same way. But the tendency is clear. On the average day, **more than 95 percent of public radio stations promote too many programs.**

This is inefficient for two reasons: First, it prevents the listener from hearing the message often enough to remember it (more on this in the “Repetition” section). Second, a multitude of promos just adds to the shower of noise that we dump on our listeners.



Take the station in this graph above, WXXX. Data in the chart come from an actual station that typically airs 19 different promos within a week. While this station promotes more programming than our system average, their tactics are typical of most public radio stations. **Two WXXX programs are promoted 15 times a week, while the remaining 17 are promoted an average of three and a half times a week.**

Although the program director obviously targeted two programs for heavier exposure, promos for the other 17 get in the way, taking up most of the station’s remaining available slots. **As a result of promoting so many programs, the station promotes none effectively.**

It is almost a cliché to discuss today’s message-soaked culture—where people are confronted with hundreds, even thousands, of messages a day. We air some as parts of station breaks or talk sets, including programming details, weather and traffic reports, underwriting credits, public service announcements, and the like.

This alone makes the case for reducing the number of messages we put in front of a listener—just to clear the air. Complicating matters further, research indicates that when we confront listeners with multiple, unconnected, info-packed messages, they simply tune us out. At that point, listening to the radio requires too much attention, so they exile us to their mental periphery.

Feng shui for stations

Clear, well-constructed messages resonate with listeners and make them aware of what your station offers. One way to help those messages register is by removing unnecessary information. As part of this project, I’ve included a fun side project called Public Radio Feng Shui.

If you read a book about the ancient Chinese discipline of feng shui, it is likely to begin by advising you to throw out or give away things you don’t need. **In other words, before you arrange or rearrange anything, eliminate the clutter.**

As applied to a radio station, this is a two-step process.

- 1. Make a list of 10 things the station says on air that can be eliminated.**
- 2. Pledge to get those words, phrase, promos, etc. off the air within 10 days.**

The editing can be as simple as trimming tangential detail from copy, eliminating the “www” from web addresses, dropping the word “degrees” from weather updates, and bypassing key signatures from mentions of classical music pieces. The changes can also be as significant as pulling the community calendars from the air or talking with your underwriting reps about removing phone numbers from underwriting announcements. **Whatever the list items, they are clutter—information bits that accomplish nothing.** Getting them out of the way makes the remaining messages more likely to be heard.

Clutter-free messages

Reducing the noise level is essential, but so is presenting a promo with a clear and concise message. **The most effective messages—the ones listeners mentally process, retain, and recall most easily—are those that contain the clearest ideas, fewest words, and no unnecessary details or tangents.** Research into message recall and retention has proven repeatedly that the impact of a message on listeners is proportionally reduced by the amount of “information bits” that surround the message. The fewer information bits packed into a promotional spot, the more likely it will make an impression.

Take, for example, the following *A Prairie Home Companion* promo (also available online in [RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), and [mp3](#)):

“This week A Prairie Home Companion comes to you from Ames, Iowa — Iowa State. With blues man Dave Moore, pianist Radoslav Lorkovich, The Barn Owl Band, the news from Lake Wobegon, and much more.”

Without looking back on the text (or replaying the audio), can you recall the names of all the performers? Of course not. If you remember anything, you might recall that *A Prairie Home Companion* will feature a variety of music and the news from Lake Wobegon. So if there is little chance we will remember the extraneous information, why include it?

As with many elements of this project, these results have applicability outside of program promotion. I have advised that while stations are looking at how they promote programming, it may be a good time to take a fresh look at all the different kinds of information presented on their station. Are there tangential details or information bits that are not necessary? Removing these can help clear some of the static and give those well-constructed promo messages a chance to resonate.

Section 5: The Three Rs of Program Promotion: Repetition (Part One: Optimum Effective Scheduling)

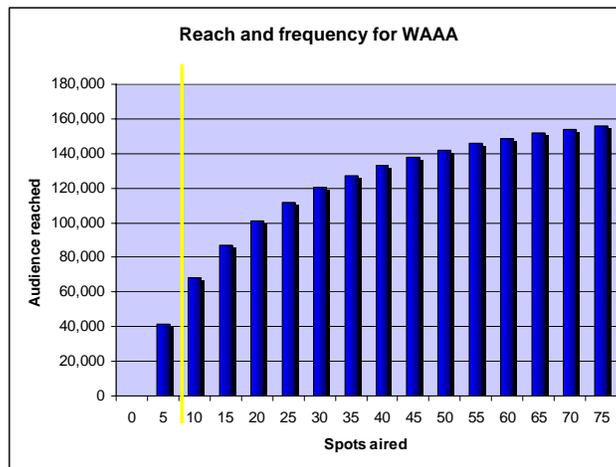
According to researchers, an average listener must hear a message three times within a week to retain and recall the information that it contains. That brings us to our second “R” of on-air program promotion: “Repetition.” Similar to “Reduction,” Repetition has two meanings: increasing exposure and reach, and breaking away from the “weekly” mindset that broadcasters exist in.

First, a few definitions.

When we discuss the importance of reach, we are talking about three different kinds of reach:

- **Total reach: the number of people that who hear a message.**
- **Effective reach: the number of people who hear a message often enough to remember it.**
- **Wasted reach: everything that falls below the mark of effective reach.**

Among surveyed stations, **the average program promo runs 8 times a week.** While this frequency reaches a large number of people, it is far below any acceptable measure of effectiveness.



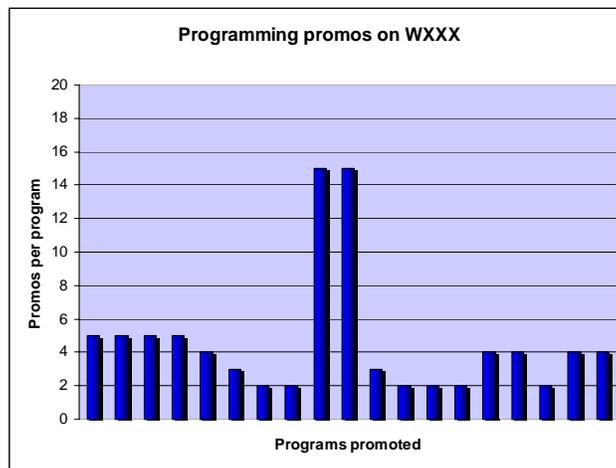
This is a “reach and frequency” chart for an actual radio station, WAAA (these charts can be generated by most audience data software such as PD Advantage and ListenerPC). This station has a weekly Cume of 195,200 listeners, with an average of 9,900 people listening at any given time. The numbers across the bottom indicate of the number of times a spot airs in a week; the numbers on the left indicate the number of people who hear it at least once. The yellow line indicates the system average of 8 airings per promo. For WAAA, the total reach with these 8 airings is approximately 60,000 listeners. While that large **total** reach may seem impressive, consider the need for **effective** reach.

While WAAA achieves a total reach of 60,000 people (the number who hear the promo at least once) when it airs a promo 8 times (our system average), the number of listeners who have been *effectively* reached (those who have heard the promo at least three times within a week) is **less than one percent**, or fewer than 2,000 listeners. Obviously, this is highly problematic due to its ineffectiveness.

WAAA is not an exception. At a typical public radio station, listeners tune in an average of six times a week for one hour each time. What are the chances that listeners to *any* station will hear enough promos to achieve effective reach? Again, practically none.

As an interesting side note, **stations have a tendency to promote local programming more than national programming.** They schedule these promos more regularly and air them almost twice as often. **On average, stations promote local programming 14 times per week;** however, this is still far below any acceptable measure of effectiveness.

Look again at the chart illustrating the number of program promos run on WXXX (originally found on page 11).



As with WAAA, less than 1 percent of WXXX's weekly Cume audience will hear *any* promo enough times to remember it, including the two programs most heavily promoted by the station. Even for those two programs, WXXX would have to quadruple the number of airings to effectively reach a majority of its audience.

If a station does not put a message in listeners' ears often enough for them to retain or recall it, there is no point in airing it at all.

The answer for WXXX, and for most public radio stations, is to jettison the less frequently aired promos so that the station can focus promo inventory on its two or three promotional priorities. Of course, those priorities can change periodically, but the key to success is selecting a small number of programs to promote and then airing them often enough that most listeners will be able to recall the message.

The Zen-like simplicity of both “Reduction” and “Repetition” goes against our very nature as broadcasters. We are information professionals, trained to hunt down, vet, and present information to our listeners. Our instinct is to provide more and more—to link quantity with quality. But if our promos are to resonate with meaning, we must think more like a listener. Listeners value our stations and programming, yet we compete for their attention with hundreds of other messages, concerns, and stimuli. Rather than overwhelming listeners with detail, minutiae, and variety, we can make our best impression with selective, precise, and well-targeted ideas.

OES

When stations decide to air programming promos, most station staffers agree it is a good idea. But there is usually far less consensus about how often those messages should air. The solution to this quandary is called OES.

If you work with radio programming or on-air promotion, even tangentially, you’ve probably heard of **OES—Optimum Effective Scheduling**—a radio scheduling strategy that was developed in the late 1980s by commercial radio researchers Steve Marx and Pierre Bouvard (currently a president at Arbitron). **Radio professionals using OES make calculations that are unique to their stations. Those calculations help the stations air messages often enough within a week for listeners to recall and retain the information.** How often is that? **Sixty times a week for the average public radio station.**

Many public radio professionals have heard of OES because it has been considered a “best practice” in public radio for more than 15 years. During that time, there has been more than half a dozen sessions at public radio conferences about the benefits of OES. Networks and program producers have invoked OES as a benchmark for on-air promo campaigns. The Development Exchange suggests OES as a component of its “year-round fundraising” strategies. OES even has its own sidebar in the PRPD *Program Director’s Handbook*. As a method for determining the best reach and frequency of on-air promotion, it is public radio’s gold standard. Yet, despite this universal agreement on the system’s benefits, practically no stations use it.

In this project’s survey, responding stations aired an average of 10 different program promos. **Of those surveyed stations, only three aired any promo at a level that approached the OES standard.** The average program promo airs on a station eight times, which is about one-seventh of what an average OES schedule recommends.

Calculating a station’s OES number is very simple. The calculation requires two numbers from the station’s latest Arbitron audience report. (If these numbers are not handy, they are available on the Radio Research Consortium website at <http://rrconline.org/arbitron>.)

Simply divide the station’s weekly cume audience (195,200 in the example below) by the average quarter-hour (AQH) audience (9,900). The result is the turnover ratio (19.7). Multiply the turnover ratio by 3.29, and the result is the station’s OES number (65). That is the number of times a message must be aired for half the station’s audience to hear it three times.

	<i>Example</i>	Station
Station's Target Cume	195,200
Divided by Target AQH	÷ <u>9,900</u>
Turnover ratio	= 19.7	=
Multiplied by	x <u>3.29</u>	x <u>3.29</u>
Station's Target OES number:	65	=

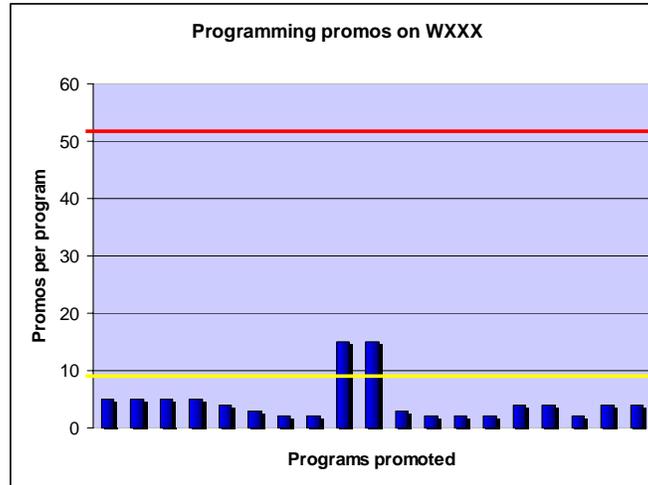
There is also an [online OES calculator](#) available on this project's web site.

This OES number calculates the number of times a station must air a message so that half its audience will hear a message three times.

This raises two fairly obvious questions:

First, **why three times?** Cognitive researchers say that **the average listener needs three exposures to an audio message within a week's time to process the message's information.** This is surprisingly consistent across demographic groups.

Second, **why settle for just half the audience?** Think of the makeup of a radio station's audience: Some people listen a lot at regular intervals; others listen far less often and less regularly. In the reach and frequency chart on page 13, notice that the message reaches fewer and fewer new people the more often it airs. **Once we reach the OES number (three airings for 50 percent of the audience), further airings yield diminishing returns.** At that point, we are drilling deeper and deeper into our fringe audience, many of whom don't even listen three times in a week. In other words, a message could air during every quarter-hour, every day, all week, and it still will fail to reach all remaining listeners three times.



Let's return again to the data from an actual station (here called WXXX) that was featured earlier. This time, the chart includes a yellow line that indicates the system average of 8 airings for each promo. The red line indicates the OES number for this station (52 airings within a week). Since every promo aired fails to meet any measure of effective reach (less than 1% of its audience hears any promo often enough to remember it), there is little point to airing them. **If WXXX canceled most of the different promos from air ("Reduction") and put all of the (now) unused promo inventory towards the two more heavily aired promos, it would achieve its OES number for both—without adding a single promotion avail to the broadcast logs.** While this data is specific to one station, it represents situations found at almost all public stations.

OES Tolerance

Earlier, I pointed out that **OES will not exhaust the promo inventory at stations. Most public radio stations have so many promotional avails on their broadcast logs that they could air two or three OES schedules simultaneously.** The problem at most stations is that they are promoting too many programs at once, thereby restricting the airings for each promo. Once a station has made the decision to reduce and repeat targeted promos and has determined its OES number, the station needs to determine the number of simultaneous OES schedules they can air, or their OES tolerance.

The calculation is just as easy as figuring out OES. Simply **take the number of avails in a seven-day period and divide that number by the station's OES number.** The result is the station's OES tolerance.

Two real world examples of determining OES tolerance:

- WBBB has 147 cross promotion avails throughout the week and an OES of 64—it can handle up to two OES schedules.
- WCCC has 235 cross promotion avails and an OES of 58. That station can handle up to four OES promo schedules at once.

That is not to suggest that stations should always run the maximum number of OES schedules. It just means that stations should not run more campaigns than their OES

tolerance. The most important component is to run those campaigns at their OES frequency.

When most programmers or promoters calculate OES for the first time, they usually experience a variation of "sticker shock." OES is a big number. When I discuss OES with colleagues at stations, they often dismiss the idea of committing to so many messages. "This number of promos is too aggressive," they say. Or "airing this many promos will burn out my audience."

OES definitely overexposes one well-connected listener group: station staff members. Many radio station staffers listen to their station 10, 20, 40, or more hours per week. If a promo airs 60 times, they probably will hear it a great deal more than three times. In commercial radio, there is a term for this reaction: "Hit Record Syndrome." Staff members come close to revolt over the number of times they play "Free Bird" or the new Britney Spears single. However, the station is programmed for thousands of listeners who hear much less of the promo, not a dozen oversaturated staff members.

At many stations, an average listener tunes in about half a dozen times, for a total of five to eight hours of listening a week. With that limited amount of exposure, **what is the chance that an average listener will hear more than three of those 60 aired promos? Very, very small.**

According to the statistics that form the basis for OES, only half of those listeners will encounter a third airing, let alone any number above that. Even core listeners, who may tune in twice as often for longer periods of time, have a minimal chance of encountering excessive repeats of the promo.

OES really is not as big and intimidating as it appears. **Stations can easily adapt to it with a simple paradigm shift.** I usually suggest the following solution: Try being the same, but a little bit different. For example, if the station airs promos for nine different programs, each receiving a roughly equal number of airings each week, try an OES schedule for just three of those programs. Run those for two months, then switch to three others. Two months later, switch to the remaining three programs. **Over the course of six months, the station will have run the same number of promos per program, but in a much more listener-friendly way, with greater efficiency and effectiveness.**

For stations that are still resistant to a more efficient and structured program promo strategy, there is a simple question: **If the point of airing program promos is to raise awareness and listening but stations are not running enough to achieve that goal, what's the point of running promos at all?**

There really is no point if the promos fail to do their job.

Here is what we know: **Well-constructed messages, presented to listeners often enough for them to remember them, increase awareness of the station and its programming.**

There are more sophisticated ways to offer an OES-style promo schedule to a specific subgroup of a station's audience, thus using fewer promos. However, many stations who claim to attempt more targeted promotion still fall far below the required

number of airings for even this targeted group of listeners. **In short, airing a handful of promos for a program each week is a waste of time.**

Another important element of using OES is managing it well—not simply scheduling a certain number of promos but introducing staff members to the concept and the unfamiliar methodology. Acknowledge to them that it will seem like a lot of exposure. At the same time, assure the staff that, from a listener's perspective, it is just right and they won't tune out the message. **Using OES, promos will resonate more clearly with them. It will help them appreciate the station and its offerings even more than they do now.**

Targeted OES

While most promotional messages are meant for the station's entire audience, there are occasions when programmers and promoters will want to create OES-like exposure to a smaller segment of the audience. Targeting OES towards a subset of listeners is an advanced skill and should only be attempted by stations *after* they have become well-versed in OES in both theory and practice.

Here are a few examples where stations might want to use targeted exposure:

- Increase crossover of *Morning Edition* listeners to *All Things Considered*.
- Increase awareness of *Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me* among NPR news listeners.
- Increase crossover between midday music offerings and evening music.

A modified take on OES (targeted OES) can be used to target exposure, and this section will demonstrate two methods for doing so. While the average OES schedule at a public radio station is 60 message airings within a week, **targeted OES allows you to air fewer messages while achieving the same result.**

With targeted OES, the goal is the same as with standard OES—make sure that at least half of the (targeted) audience hears the message three times within a week. Since you are only exposing the targeted audience while they are listening, the additional exposures (to the rest of the station's audience) are not necessary.

There are two important considerations to remember. First, the more compact your target program and its audience, the less effective and useful targeted OES will be for your station. For example, if you want to run a targeted OES campaign in *A Prairie Home Companion* (airing only one day a week, for two hours), you will likely find that the targeted OES calculation will suggest running a message 8 or 9 times during the program—a practical impossibility. If you use a larger programming block, over more days (for example: midday programming during weekdays), you will start to see targeted OES's utility (where target OES may suggest running as few as 20 promos during the source programming through the week).

Secondly, **make sure you promote source programming that is of interest to the target audience.** In an ideal world, fans of *The Grateful Dead Hour* would also enjoy *The Metropolitan Opera*, there is not much sense in trying to cross-promote those two programs. To check crossover appeal of programming, you can either run a crossover analysis in ListenerPC, or use the Appeal chart on your station's

AudiGraphics web site (under "Station Digest" > "Appeal," then click on the "Appeal" button).

First, you have to determine the Cume and AQH for the targeted audience's use of the source program. You can do that with a few minutes of work in ListenerPC.

The calculation for targeted OES is exactly the same as that for standard OES. What makes it different is that stations use the Cume and AQH figures for a subset of their audience.

In the example below, WAAA wants to schedule programming promos for *All Things Considered* to air inside *Morning Edition*. To do this using targeted OES, the calculations only deal with the specific audience numbers for *Morning Edition*, which airs on WAAA Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. until 9 a.m.

Using RRC's ListenerPC to create a targeted OES Campaign

Stations can use the crossover analysis in ListenerPC, from the [Radio Research Consortium](#), to promote between programs or dayparts. When attempting this, stations must first define their *source* program (in the above examples, *Morning Edition*, NPR news, and midday music) and a *destination* program (the programming for which the station is trying to increase awareness or listening). Using targeted OES, the promotional message for the destination program does not need to be put in front of *all* listeners, just those who listen to the source program.

All that is needed is a calculator (or the project's [online OES calculator](#)) and access to a station's Arbitron data through the Radio Research Consortium's ListenerPC program

Instructions for using ListenerPC to determine Target Cume and Target AQH

1. In the ListenerPC program, select "New Request."
2. Select the appropriate market and survey period.
3. Do not change the default Geography settings, click "Next."
4. Do not change the default Demographics settings, click "Next."
5. Select "Stations and Dayparts."
6. Select appropriate station, days of week, and hours
Ex: For Morning Edition on WAAA: "WAAA" "Mon-Fri 5A-9A."
7. Click "Run Request."

At this point, ListenerPC will generate a text report indicating the station's Cume, Gross Cume, and AQH for the selected days and hours. For example:

ListenerPC
Produced by RRC LPC Version 1.0 from Arbitron Diary Data

YourMarket - Spring 2003
Persons 12+ in Total Market

	Cume	Gross	AQH
WAAA-FM Mon-Fri 5A-9A	74500	716900	9000
TOTAL For Group 1	74500	716900	9000

Copy the Cume and AQH numbers (ignore the Gross number, it is not used in the OES calculation). The Cume number in this report should be used as the station's

Target Cume for the Target OES calculation below; the AQH should be used as the station's Target AQH number.

Example:

	<i>Example</i>	Station
Station's Target Cume	74,500
Divided by Target AQH	÷ <u>9,000</u>
Turnover ratio	= 8.28	=
Multiplied by	× <u>3.29</u>	× <u>3.29</u>
Station's Targeted OES number:	27.2	=

According to targeted OES, WAAA would have to air 27 *All Things Considered* promos through a week of *Morning Edition*, or roughly five a day, in order to ensure that half of the *Morning Edition* audience hears the promo often enough to remember it.

Here is another example. Let us say that WAAA wants to do the opposite: promote *Morning Edition* to its *All Things Considered* audience. WAAA airs *All Things Considered* from 4 p.m. until 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Using ListenerPC, WAAA's program director determines the ATC Target Cume is 62,200 and the Target AQH is 10,200. Using the OES calculation $[(62,200/10,200) \times 3.29]$, WAAA determines that they need to run 20 *Morning Edition* promos every weekday during ATC, or two per hour. This higher number per hour of programming is due to the higher turnover in the station's ATC audience than in its ME audience (the audience comes and goes more frequently, listening for shorter periods of time).

Using AudiGraphics to create targeted OES campaigns

There is a second method to achieve targeted OES using Strategic Impact AudiGraphics from [Audience Research Analysis](#). This method involves determining where a program or daypart's potential audience listens to the station during other times of the week. The station can then determine where this potential audience *does not* listen, and then eliminate OES promos scheduled during those ineffective hours.

There are no specific instructions for targeted OES using AudiGraphics, as the audience data, and resulting Strategic Impact AudiGraphics analysis, will be different for each station. If stations wish to use AudiGraphics to establish a targeted OES campaign, it is best to schedule a consultation directly with [Leslie Peters](#) at ARA, who will be happy to assist stations in this effort.

Section 6: The Three R's of Program Promotion: Repetition (Part Two: Program-specific Promotion)

The “weekly” mindset

The second part of “Repetition” is freeing ourselves from the “weekly” mindset that is a foundation of radio. Broadcast schedules run weekly, station traffic logs run weekly, and Arbitron diaries run weekly. However, listeners do not always tune-in with such a regimen. **There is substantial evidence that listeners listen to radio habitually. There is also evidence that those habits cycle, albeit not necessarily on a weekly basis.** Several academic studies and data from Arbitron’s new PPM measurement system show that listeners come—and go—and come back again. They listen more heavily during some periods, then more lightly during others.

Episodic or “program-specific” promotion

Most of the promotion in public radio is “**episodic**” or “**program-specific**”: **promoting a program’s specific installment or episode instead of the program itself.** Such program-specific promos often assume that the listener already knows what a program is about and rarely takes the time to offer insight for those (many) “unenlightened” listeners.

There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that this is not an effective way to promote programming. At worst, it changes the message too frequently; at best, it may be too subtle.

Interestingly, even when commercial radio offered patchwork, episode-focused programming—sixty, seventy years ago—radio did not promote that programming the way we do today. Radio stations rarely promoted themselves on-air at all until the advent of TV in the 1950s—at which point a great deal of episodic radio went away.

Even television promotion does not work the way we think it does. TV promotes episodes, but research into the effectiveness of those television promotional spots produces results that are surprisingly similar to radio’s. Basically, it does not matter how many times a network or station promotes programming, **you cannot create interest in non-relevant programming.** Research shows that the episodic promotion we see on television works best for special programming or established series.

Research into information-laden messages, like episodic or program-specific promotion on radio, demonstrates that this kind of messaging can get too bogged down in detail to convey a consistent idea over time. These promos sound like grocery lists and fail to give listeners concrete ideas of what a program is about and why it is relevant to them. At best, they force the listener to do too much of the work.

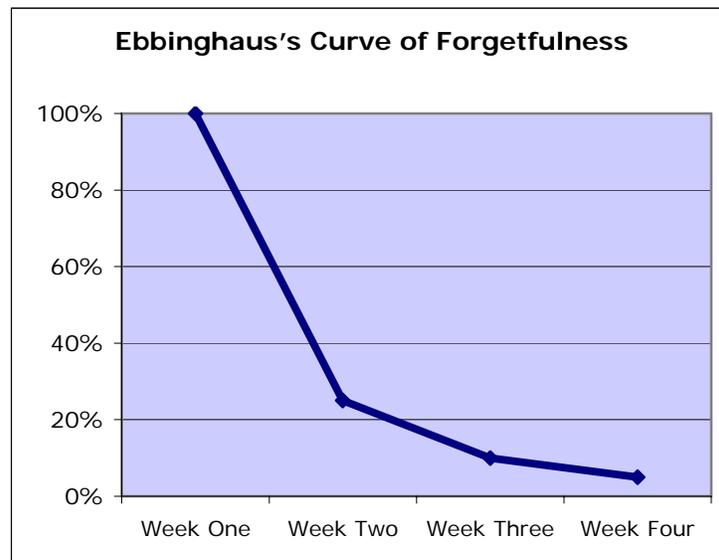
For example...return to the promo for *A Prairie Home Companion*, discussed earlier (also available online in [RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), and [mp3](#)):

"This week A Prairie Home Companion comes to you from Ames, Iowa — Iowa State. With blues man Dave Moore, pianist Radoslav Lorkovich, The Barn Owl Band, the news from Lake Wobegon, and much more."

First off, who is the voice in the promo? Host Garrison Keillor is never identified. Do not make the dangerous mistake of thinking "Everyone knows Garrison!" In reality, everyone does *not* know Garrison, and while a fair number of listeners understand what *PHC* is, the large majority do not.

Secondly, how many of those performers can you name without looking at the copy or listening again to the online audio? Not many, and you were paying attention. Imagine how little of that promo will stick with a listener. Yet the music, laughter, and storytelling is so full of beautiful sound, it could make a very evocative promo.

Another reason that program-specific promotion is problematic is that we are changing the message daily or weekly. **Research into message retention shows that, without reinforcement, information recall erodes quickly.** Below is a commonly used model for information retention over time, called Ebbinghaus's Curve of Forgetfulness. It demonstrates that 75% of information learned in week one—and not reinforced afterwards—is forgotten in week two. 90% of it is gone in week three, and so on.



An antidote to program-specific promotion is creating promos that creatively, yet simply, describe the program in a way that makes sense and is relevant to the listener. This concept is not what most of us think of as "generic" promos. Most stations use "generic" promos when a specific, episodic promo is not available. "Generic promos" often carry negative connotations. However, when created, produced, and used correctly, they may be our most effective tool for reaching listeners.

If stations are going to use promos over a period of several weeks or months, they need to replace the current expectation of generic promos with one that better captures the “taste and feel” of the programs they promote.

We know that the most effective messages contain the clearest ideas—ideas that are absent of tangential information or unnecessary detail. It is difficult to do that when providing a complete guest or subject list for an upcoming show. **Those details are quickly (if not immediately) lost and forgotten by listeners.**

Many producers and programmers who favor program-specific promos say that if the subtext and theme are present and reinforced over time, then the message will emerge over time. In other words, they suggest that promoting the “hard news” or “features” coming up in that day’s *All Things Considered* will, over time, help listeners understand that *ATC* includes hard news and features. However, most listeners process this information peripherally. Subtext means subtlety. **These messages are far too subtle to get through because they force listeners to do too much of the work.** Instead of building awareness, listeners just reject these messages entirely and devote their attention to something more relevant to their needs and interests.

Taste and Feel

A well-constructed message, delivered to listeners often enough for them to recognize it, can raise awareness of programming. However, **without reinforcement over time, the impact of the message fades quickly.** Instead of laundry listing guests or subjects, “taste and feel” promos describe the program in a way that is relevant to the listener by describing the program’s content. Then stations can use that promo for extended periods of time.

Here are a few examples of “taste and feel” promos and what distinguishes them from current definitions of generic and program-specific promos.

This American Life

Below are online links to three examples, courtesy of Ira Glass, host of *This American Life*.

- **“Generic” promo** ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [mp3](#))
An older generic promo that has been offered by *This American Life* for several years. While it has a quirky oddness to it (which is an occasional attribute of the show), think of how this promo would sound to a listener who had no idea what *This American Life* is or sounds like.
- **Program-specific promo** ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [mp3](#))
This promo supports a specific weekly program. While it gives you some idea about the featured story, it gets too caught up in creating a humorous moment to give a complete idea of what any other story on *This American Life* might sound like.
- **“Taste and feel” promo** ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [mp3](#))
After discussing these issues with Ira, I asked him to produce a “taste and feel” promo as discussed earlier. The premise is to give the listener an idea of what *This American Life* is about, how it sounds, and what the listening experience may be like.

WKSU folk music

The second set of examples come from WKSU, where the station offers folk music on weekend evenings. In previous listener music tests and research, **WKSU learned that many station listeners enjoy the music played during folk programming but are unfamiliar with the performers and repertoire.** This presents an unusual problem: how can a station build awareness and promote an interest in the programming without using the artists' names or other specific information? Answer: let the music speak for itself.

Below are online links to four example audio promos WKSU created to promote folk music. The station ran these promos on an OES schedule over a three month period. To prevent the messages from becoming stale over time, they were updated and changed. Note that these four promos contain only two (slightly different) messages. Throughout the campaign, the messages remained exactly the same but the music selections were updated.

- WKSU folk promo one ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [MP3](#))
- WKSU folk promo two ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [MP3](#))
- WKSU folk promo three ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [MP3](#))
- WKSU folk promo four ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [MP3](#))

After the WKSU folk promo campaign, the station saw a huge increase in reported listening during folk music. Over the past three years, WKSU's folk music averaged a Cume audience of 25,300 and an Average Quarter Hour (AQH) audience of 3,300. During the Fall 2003 book, when the promos were running on an OES schedule for several months, the Cume rose to 32,800 and AQH grew to 5,100. **The result was the strongest book ever for folk music on WKSU, with a 23% increase in Cume audience and a 36% increase in AQH.** It is important to remember the discussion in Section 3 (page 8) concerning the ability to prove a link between on-air promos and increased listening. All that has been proved in WKSU's experiment with folk promos is a *correlation* between the promo campaign and increased listening. That said, with results this strong and consistent, it is not risky to exercise a bit of faith in the concept.

The Thistle and Shamrock

The generic promo for *The Thistle and Shamrock* (discussed in greater detail in Section 7) is an unintentional example of a great "taste and feel" promo, similar to the WKSU promos. Here, the host dispenses with all descriptive chatter and lets the music describe itself. Below is an online link to a collection of two of those promos—the same promos that *The Thistle and Shamrock* currently offers as generic promos.

- *The Thistle and Shamrock* generic "taste and feel" promos ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [MP3](#))

Section 7: The Three R's of Program Promotion: Real Content

The final “R” of on-air program promotion is “Real Content”—the production, writing, and radio esthetics that go into promos.

Before describing specific tactics, it is important to consider the strategy and objectives guiding on-air promos.

Objective

A well-constructed message, delivered to listeners often enough for them to recognize it, can raise awareness of programming. However, awareness is not an end in itself; it is but a step along a journey. Many marketers say that “awareness” is a bad goal because there is no action involved. Promos are best used when they are part of a larger objective that has a specific target and requires action (thus, success is measurable). **Awareness is not a means to an end in itself, but one of several means that work together, to achieve a station’s goals.** Such goals could include increasing the time spent listening by audience members or raising more money from the station’s contributors. Promos can be one of several important strategic tactics to accomplishing those objectives.

Determining a promo’s objective is vital to motivating a listener to action. Before sitting down to write a single word of promo copy or edit a piece of sound, stations should answer three questions.

- **Why are we promoting this program?**
- **What are we trying to accomplish?**
- **Who are we trying to reach?**

If a station cannot devise a single answer for each of these three questions—each answer containing seven words or less—they need to try again or refine the scope of the promotional campaign. To help your station determine the success of your campaign when it concludes, answer the first two questions with clear, objective criteria that can be measured. Again, promoting a program to “raise awareness” is not enough. Stations should try to determine how that awareness will benefit both the listener and the station, and *that* is the station’s true objective. After determining the objective, the promo’s content should directly address the answers to those three questions.

Promo producers should approach the objective *creatively* and from a perspective that reflects listener wants and needs. Too many times we place language clues in promos that focus on station objectives rather than on listeners’ needs. For example, promos often start or end with a call to action similar to “Tune in Friday night at 7 to hear ...” without giving the listener a good reason why he or she should do so. Research tells us that it is crucial to frame our messages in a way that is relevant and accessible to listeners—or they simply won’t recall it.

Production and writing tactics in promos

There are some writing and production tactics that have repeatedly proven to aid in message retention and recall. Unfortunately, we should avoid several of the most effective because they don't bode well with PRPD Core Values and are incompatible with the way most stations present programming. **These include: sound effects like "laser zaps," echo and reverb effects, over-equalization, compression, fast paced or frantic speech, silence, and (in some cases) humor.** However, there are other effective tools, which are compatible with Core Values and programming esthetic that programmers and producers can learn from.

Let's take these in reverse order of compatibility.

Sound effects

Sound effects attract immediate attention and help the listener quickly process information immediately. These are very common techniques in many commercial radio formats. While it is easy to assume that these tactics are simply for show—superfluous fluff that contains no substance—actually, these sounds are very purposeful. Cognitive researchers have determined that through skin conduction test and heart rate monitoring that these laser blasts, echo effects, and sound treatments cause a listener to pay more attention to what is being said. Their purpose is to gain attention.

Obviously, these production techniques are not Core Values-friendly. As an illustration, I revised a *Morning Edition* promo to demonstrate what it may sound like if produced using these techniques ([Real Audio](#), [Windows Media](#), [mp3](#)).

Silence can also be used to draw attention. In public radio, we generally refer to this as pacing. However, in this context, it is used purely for effect with little care given to context or substance. Researchers have also determined that the use of silence or unnatural pauses can gain listeners' attention in a manner that is similar to sound effects.

Humor

Humor is a powerful attention-grabber when used well, but it can also cause a listener to deliberately tune out information if used poorly. While humor has a place in public radio, it is difficult to see how it could be universally appropriate in promos. Humor is an incredibly powerful spice. If someone finds it funny, there are probably two people who will not get it or are turned off by it. Since humor has such high negative potential, it is probably best to use it sparingly. Research into the use of humor in audio messages shows that listeners react viscerally to message content based on the perceived "quality" of the humor. In other words, **even an interesting and relevant message can turn off listeners if it is wrapped in bad humor.** Other research projects have pointed out that public radio listeners enjoy "intelligent" humor by public radio personalities for whom humor is part of their normal role, such as Garrison Keillor, the Car Talk guys, and the cast of *Wait Wait Don't Tell Me!*

Questions and invitations to imagine

There is another group of tactics that has had mixed results when tested by cognitive researchers. When used well, they can be very effective at creating a strong message in listeners' minds. If executed poorly, they can easily backfire.

The first is called “instructions to imagine”—such as “Think of a time when you were happy and carefree...” It is important to remember that most radio listeners are passively engaged with the medium. They listen while they are doing other things: washing dishes, preparing meals, driving to work, etc. Instructions to imagine are only effective when the evoked image has higher benefit for the listener than the task at hand.

Similar to “instructions to imagine” are using questions in copy, sometimes referred to as “question leads.” Generally, question leads are considered poor copy writing. Questions are a lazy tool for segueing into a given topic and are rarely effective at reaching a large number of listeners. Studies have demonstrated that questions in messages can aid in recall by drawing attention to the message—but not universally. With questions and invitations to imagine, a promo writer must be prepared for a frank answer to their questions.

For example, if a news story starts with the question:

“Have you ever wondered what a defeated Presidential candidate does with himself after losing an election?”

Most listeners would respond that, frankly, no, they had never thought about that and then they tune out the remainder of the message.

Question leads can be powerful tactics for reaching a specific subgroup within an audience. I recall one example of an announcer who rewrote a PSA for a local chess tournament. She started the PSA by asking, “Do you love chess?” If the listener does, indeed, love chess, she probably had their immediate attention. For the remaining large number of non-chess lovers, they would quickly tune out the question, as well as the remainder of the announcer’s break.

Music

Music can also be a very effective tactic in creating promos that stay with listeners, but it can be very distracting. Music can be image evoking. In these cases, music should be used as a “character” in the promo, almost like a sound bite or actuality in a news story. The best test for music is to apply a Core Values lens to it: does it have a purpose? Does it add something to the promo that makes its presence necessary? If not, maybe it is best to rethink the music’s use.

Here is an example of using music in a classical music promo.

- Haydn “Hen” promo ([Real Audio](#), [Windows Media](#), [mp3](#)).

It’s worth noting that, while this promo uses music to illuminate the music, it fails against another of the Three Rs—“Reduction.” The promo contains too much information and detail. The promo could be even more effective if the word count in the copy was cut in half, dropping most of the tangential information.

Often times, **well-utilized music expresses ideas better than any verbal description.** Music can help effectively express the “taste and feel” of a featured piece of music or the type of music offered during a program, day part, or format. Research demonstrates this is a very effective way to communicate an idea to listeners with resonance. As long as the music is relevant to the listener, it can create a bridge that connects listeners and an understanding of the promoted programming.

Here is another example of letting music speak for itself, without redundant or unnecessary verbal detail:

- *The Thistle and Shamrock* promos ([RealAudio](#), [Windows Media](#), [MP3](#))

Vivid descriptions and image-evoking sound

The most effective promo production techniques, which are very complimentary with both Core Values and public radio programming, are image-evoking use of sound and vivid verbal descriptions.

Studies show that image-evoking sound stimulates attention, provides a structural framework for the message, increases recall and retention, and creates stronger emotional reactions. This is something with which public radio has a long track record. Our news programming has understood the power of natural sound since the beginnings of public radio. Our promos should always reflect this purposeful use of dynamic sound as well.

Vivid word descriptions are somewhat self-explanatory and are as much an art as a science. Good copy writing should be more Hemingway than Michener; a Zen-like sense of minimalism and economy best serves the promo's message. There should be no wasted words, unnecessary detail, or lack of clarity.

Research has repeatedly proven that, given a radio listener's limited attention to *any* message, verbose, vague, or poorly crafted promos fail to stick with listeners, regardless of the potential impact of the message they attempt to express.

Poor word choice is the most common crime in copy writing. Following is an easy tactic for dealing with some extremely common hang-ups with word descriptions.

This, like many areas of this project, has usefulness outside of program promos—just about any message on your station can be made better with this tactic. It is called the Avoided Word List.

I got the idea a few years ago after reading a book about the magazine *Vanity Fair*. According to this book, the magazine's editor, Graydon Carter, has a similar list of more than 140 words that are not permitted to appear in *Vanity Fair* because they are all overused, commonly misused (or misunderstood), or fail to convey a clear meaning. After reading this, I started to keep a similar list of words I heard in on-air promo copy. My list contains only 24 words, but I often ask for re-writes when I see them in promotional copy.

They are:

Amazing
Astounding
Awesome
Beautiful
Best
Brilliant
Classic
Extraordinary

Fabulous
Fantastic
Fascinating
Great
Incredible
Lovely
Outstanding
Quality

Remarkable
Sensational
Spectacular
Stunning
Superior
Tremendous
Unbelievable
World class

Universally, these words do not describe much of anything. They are overused or empty modifiers. Can you really tell the difference between a “great” performance and a “superior” performance? A “stunning” interview from an “outstanding” interview?

Replacing these words when they appear in copy is simple. Ask the question: “Why is it...?” Why is it stunning, why is it incredible, why is it beautiful? Create a more vivid image in the minds of listeners by inserting the answer to that question instead of the original empty modifier.

Since I put my list together, I’ve added one more overused word: in-depth. “In-depth” means details. When listening to public radio, listeners often express their appreciation for public radio’s context and understanding. They are not necessarily interested in copious detail.

Section 8: The Concept of "Audience Building"

There has been a great deal of conversation in the public radio industry over the past few years concerning the importance of "audience building." In fact, many of the authorized representatives from NPR member stations have asked the network to make it a top priority. However, the data gathered in this study indicates that the onus of audience building lies on the local level.

Audience building is not a network issue, it is a station issue. Producers are in the business of creating programs. Stations use that programming to build audience by selecting the right programming, at the right time, and doing their best to make listeners aware that it is there.

Judging by the absence of standards within our industry and the disparate practices found at stations, **public radio stations are not prepared to do their part in the promotional components of the audience building equation.**

Stations complain about promo availability and content—yet they offer no clear "best practices." Producers spend so much time addressing the disparate needs of stations that there is no way to provide the insightful content that can aid in message retention and recall. The role of stations is to align behind a central strategy. It then becomes the program producers' job to provide materials that rise up to these improved standards and efforts.

When discussing this issue, stations seem to be fixed solely on the content of promos produced by the networks and producers. In reality, the most effective audience building strategy would be for stations to audit their own promotional techniques.

If stations were to unlock the potential of their promotional inventory, it would be the equivalent of \$85 million worth of advertising. All that is necessary is to restructure current on-air promotion at stations in a more effective and efficient manner.

That action would be one of the most powerful (and potentially successful) audience building tactics imaginable.

Section 9: Survey Results

The OPPIS project's one piece of original research is the station survey which asked stations if and how their stations use various on-air programming promotion tactics. The project goal was for 75 stations to participate in the survey. **In total, 87 participated in the survey, yielding 83 completed surveys used in the project findings.** While the survey was open to any and all public stations, two-thirds of respondents were highly targeted and aggressively pursued to ensure that the results represented many of the industry's leading stations in several formats. **In all, the surveyed stations represent more than half of the national Cume for public radio.** Following is an expanded summary of results from the station survey portion of this project. Since there is such variance in definitions, practices, and standards, many results are inconclusive. Survey data has been archived and is available from [Eric Nuzum](#).

One goal of the survey was to ascertain the current industry standards for promoting programming on-air. **The average public radio station airs more than an hour of promos each week.** It is a fair comparison for stations to consider them, collectively, as if they were a program on their station.

The current standard for on-air program promotion is that there is no standard. Some stations use 30 second promos, others use 15; some use live reads, others use pre-produced promos; others use both or dump the pre-recorded promos fed from the network and create their own. **Literally, there are no two stations that promote their programming the same way.** Therefore, the survey provided only a limited amount of useful information. The most constructive results have been incorporated in earlier sections of this report. Following are some additional findings of potential interest gathered from the survey.

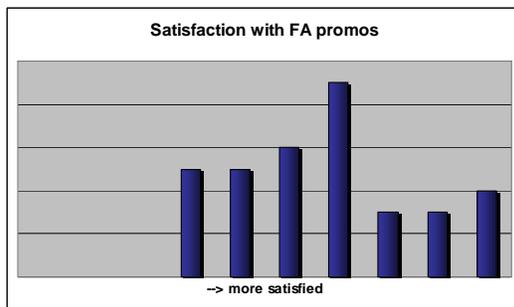
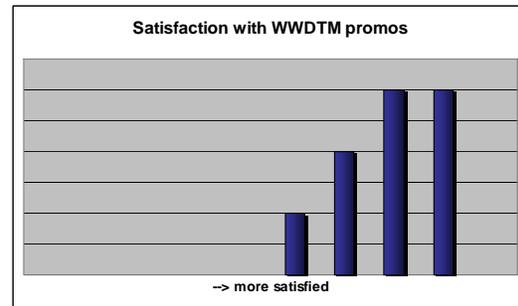
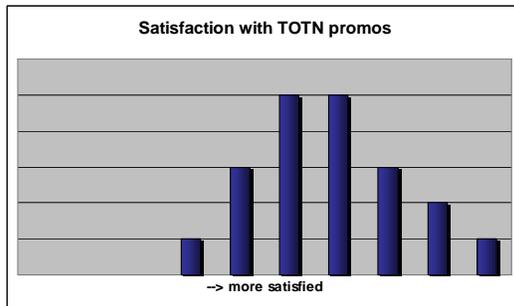
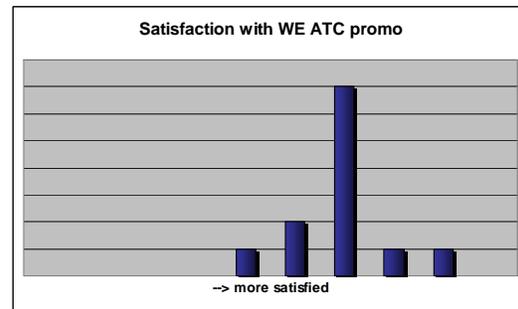
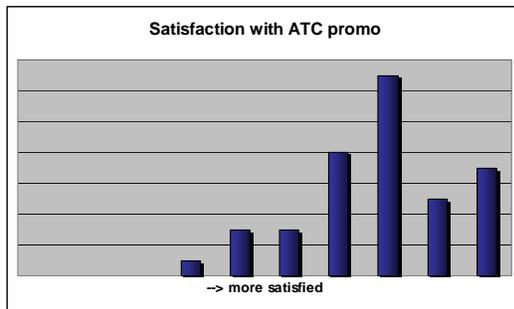
Embedded promos

Most news programs produced by NPR contain embedded promos for shows coming up later in the day or week. However, their use is inconsistent among stations. Further, most station do not air the promos often enough to reach a larger number of listeners. Below, on the left, is a list of such programs. The percentages to the right of the program name indicate the number of stations (that carry that program) that air the embedded promos during their live feed and that record them for later use. At the far right is the entire number of times those embedded promos air on stations.

	<i>Air embedded promo live</i>	<i>Record for later use</i>	<i>Average number of times played</i>
Morning Edition <i>Promos embedded included Fresh Air, Talk of the Nation, and All Things Considered</i>	59%	71%	4.3
Car Talk <i>Promos embedded included Wait Wait Don't Tell Me! and Saturday All Things Considered</i>	40%	21%	2.6

Survey respondents were asked to rate the quality of the writing and production of these embedded promos on a scale of 1 (lowest—on left) to 10 (highest—on right).

Below are graphs of their responses:



Weekly programs promoted by stations

Below is a ranking of the programs promoted most often by the stations that both air and promote them. To the right of the program name is the average number of times that program is promoted in a seven day period. (Note: Network news magazines such as *Morning Edition*, *Marketplace*, *The World*, and *All Things Considered* have been excluded from this list.)

<i>A Prairie Home Companion</i>	7 times per week
<i>Car Talk</i>	6 times per week
<i>Living on Earth</i>	5 times per week
<i>This American Life</i>	4 times per week
<i>On The Media</i>	5 times per week
<i>Wait Wait Don't Tell Me!</i>	3 times per week

The average station promotes 10 different programs or dayparts each week. With the exception of *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, locally produced programming tends to be promoted more often at stations than national programming. While the average promo airs 8 times on stations, the average for those producing (and promoting) locally produced news/information and music programming is 14.

Stations air most promos at a frequency of only 16% of their OES number, or roughly one-sixth as often as OES would recommend.

Section 10: Suggestions for Further Study

As has been indicated throughout this report, the most significant advancement in exploiting the power of on-air program promos at station is the establishment and adaptation of research-proven standards. However, since stations are largely autonomous in public radio, a wise investment for future research and study would be in **further establishing the credibility and results of the tactics mentioned in this report**. Recommendations follow:

- Test OES promotion simultaneously on a large number of stations over the course of several months and then report the results. (This has been attempted by NPR's news magazines; however, in order to control as many variables as possible, these experiments should be conducted on non-news programs that have stable content and appeal—such as *Car Talk* and *A Prairie Home Companion*).
- Repeat the message recall listening experiments that informed this study with public radio listener test subjects and use specific examples from public radio program promos.

A second priority could be investments in further information dissemination and training. The onus of future success with program promotion lies with stations and their ability to adapt to more efficient and effective methods of promoting their programming to listeners. As of this writing, NPR is in the process of retooling many of their promotional offerings to stations. However, without greater buy-in from stations, NPR will continue to be pressured to provide a wide arsenal of material for stations (which is inefficient for NPR and ineffective for stations). PRI has created some noteworthy materials relating to program promotion and OES, but stations are not following PRI's recommendations. Judging by the limited success of past efforts in these endeavors, there may be call for additional resources towards system training.

Outside of research, there is another tactical recommendation that CPB might encourage or support among program producers and networks: provide a financial incentive to stations that are willing to commit to significant and effective promotional campaigns. If a station is willing to promote a program at an OES schedule over a period of time, the station could receive a discount on carriage fees in exchange. While this would cut down on a program's income in the short term, the resulting increases in audience would aid both the station and program over time.

Section 11: Peer Feedback

Following are samples of the unsolicited peer comments received to date concerning the OPPIS project:

Thought I would share with you the changes CPRN just announced to our stations about the localized promos we send every week.

CPRN Launches a New Promo Series The Classical Top 200 are the first of the series -- starting March 8, 2004

On Monday, March 8, CPRN will begin introducing a new series of localized promos for The Classical Top 200. They will be available for download on the CPRN Station Services Site. We previously provided Classical Top 200 promos for shows through Friday, March 19. You can either replace those with these new image spots, or wait until Monday, March 22, to begin airing these new spots. Several additional promos for The Classical Top 200 will be added over the next several weeks, along with similar promos for Modern Masterpieces and Sacred Classics.

We advise that these promos be aired over several months on an OES (Optimum Effective Scheduling) rotation.

These new promos focus on building a distinctive image for the show series, as opposed to announcing the musical content of the next airing. This promotional strategy is informed by the findings of the CPB-funded On-Air Program Promotion Insight Study conducted by Eric Nuzum. In addition to reinforcing the OES concepts, the study makes clear distinction between effective imaging promos and less-effective "episodic" promos ("...on today's episode of The Classical Top 200..."). You can review the principals of OES and the study findings at <<http://ericnuzum.com/oppis>>.

The purpose of these new promos is to heighten personal interest and value of the show - and your station. The purpose of airing them on an OES rotation is to guarantee that enough people hear them to make a difference.

We believe there are significant benefits to this new promo concept. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Karla Walker
Classical Public Radio Network

I found your presentation fascinating and have been studying it. I hope to convince people here at WFYI to give OES a try. One problem I encountered was in figuring our OES Tolerance. Our station doesn't keep promotion avails numbers - we are under all underwriting. Underwriting only sells about 30% of their avails so my weekly avail number ended up being about 1500 which places our OES tolerance at 25 which I know is wrong. How do I get around this?

Thank you.

Lisa Liebschutz
WFYI

I'm Mik Davis, the General Manager of WUSM in Hattiesburg, MS. I just read your excellent article on the feng shui of promos.

Thanks for writing this, I enjoyed it.

Mik Davis
WUSM in Hattiesburg, MS

I have been following your articles in Current regarding the On-air Programming Promotions Insight Study. Is there an equivalent for television? I am very interested in any current research that has been done in regard to promotion frequency for tv. If you have any information in that regard, I would appreciate the feedback.

Regards,
Judy Armstrong
Chief Development Officer
KTEH Silicon Valley Public Television

Enjoyed your article in the recent edition of Current as well as your web-site. My question is...can the same formula be used to calculate an OES number for television??

Thanks,

John Kwak
WFSU

It was nice to meet you at the PRPD last September. I'd love to speak with you regarding promotional avails, mixed formats and re-crafting the air. Thank you, hope you are well and happy New Year.

Stephen J. Charbonneau
WGBH, Boston

Eric,
I just wanted to let you know that I thought your session on promotion was one of the best researched, organized and presented sessions of the entire conference. I am urging anyone who was not there to get a copy of the tape.

Scott Henderson
Client Relations Director
Classical Public Radio Network

Hey Eric --

Can you send me the online URL for your PRPD promotion presentation? I want to share it with people here. Thanks again for the good work!

Tara Anderson
Assistant Program Director
WFUV 90.7 FM

You're right on the money with reduction and repetition. I instituted that here at WGLT after feeling as though most of our promotions weren't effective. I just didn't hear these promos enough. Some programs received little or no promotion.

We used OES for important specials and events...but the rest of the promos -- mostly for programs -- were treated as filler. We began updating the promo schedule monthly and I only choose a certain number of programs combined with events to fill all our live read and "carted" promo avails. No more filler; everything is scheduled at our OES level.

This approach means some programs get NO promotion for a month or more. Eventually, however, those shows get promos and they rise to the surface.

We're now trying to unclutter our promo copy -- make it more simple, while keeping it interesting. I've also been pushing to eliminate web addresses or phone numbers (unless they're super catchy or easy to remember) from underwriting announcements for a while. We're also going to revamp our live read arts calendar. We have five calendars logged per day with three events on each calendar. I'm someone who announces this stuff on the air and when I hear it I can't remember the first one after hearing the third item.

Most PSA's will soon go to web only. I think the select few PSA's aired will be used to promote that most are on-line.

I'll read your OES article soon. I find all of this stuff fascinating...thanks.

Mike McCurdy
Program Director
WGLT
Normal, IL 61790-8910

Eric,

I just read through your powerpoint presentation on promotion from the conference. Now I know why everybody seemed to like it so much. I think you did a good job of distilling the concepts in ways that are useful for public radio. There are a number of suggestions that we'll be trying here.

Michael Arnold, Program Director
New Hampshire Public Radio

I have already put one of your on-air promotions plans into place at a client station. How nice to feel informed.

Sheila Rue
SR SOUND PROGRAMMING
DEI Pledge Drive Advisor

Eric,

Excellent promo session. I could tell a lot of work went into it. I set up an OES system in Dallas 8 years ago, but still haven't done so here at KUOW. I'm now putting it higher up on my list of projects to do! Excellent conference overall too. Thanks.

Jeff Hansen
Program Director KUOW

Official PRPD evaluation of On-Air Promotions Session (conducted by an anonymous attendee):

What were you hoping to learn from the session?

How much promotion is too much/enough in a break?

How should promotion be placed within dayparts

What are the important components to copy?

Informative examination of recorded promotion v live reads (including custom v generic does it make a difference?)

Should a station use generic promotion at all and if so, when?

How or if should promote station as a "service"?

What to stay away from in writing of promotion

Who writes? Who edits?

Did the session deliver? If not, why not?

The presentation was far more exhaustive than expected. It delivered what it had "promoted" and in addition provided a web link to view the entire presentation at a later date (<http://ericnuzum.com/oppis>) as well as a handout at the session. Having access to this material was (and still is) quite impressive and appreciated.

How actionable is the information that was presented/ Will you be able to use/apply what you learned when you get back home?

First impression was the O.E.S. (Optimal Effective Scheduling) formula seemed either sophisticated or too much work for little gain. But Eric Nuzum is a highly respected professional and one need listen to learn so by session's end I found I was curious about how successful this would be on our air and if we were brave enough to try it! At our station we are currently reviewing station breaks which includes writing and scheduling of promotion so this is an excellent time to look into this method of scheduling. So, actionable? This is still to be determined.

Will we try it? Still to be determined. Will we review it, play with it, discuss it and possibly return to it? Yes. This is the best way I can answer this question. Not jumping head first into the swimming pool, but testing the water, may wade in.

How effectively was the information in the session communicated?

I had just given a presentation to our radio department so was really aware of the amount of information one must impart on others and the time one has to do so. I felt he was a little rushed, wanted more time to dwell. Rightfully so. There were a lot of questions. It would have been good to have a workshop tailing this session. Perhaps in the future.

Section 12: Glossary

Following is a list of terms found throughout this report:

AQH	acronym for Average Quarter Hour. AQH stands for the average number of people listening to the radio station during a fifteen-minute period. Four quarter hours are averaged together for the hourly AQH measure.
Avail	a pre-set position in the broadcast log and schedule set aside for use of a specific element such as an underwriting credit, weather, promo, or other announcement.
Cross promotion	strategies for promoting the content of one program or day part in a separate program or day part earlier in the day or week. Specific cross promotion strategies include Vertical Flow, Vertical Skip, Horizontal Promotion, Diagonal Promotion, Promotion of Special Programming, and O.E.S. (Optimum Effective Scheduling).
Cume	a term in audience measurement used to describe the average number of people who tune in to a station during a week.
Effective reach	the number of people who hear a message often enough to remember it. Generally, this is accepted to be three message exposures within a week's time.
Episodic promotion	also known as "program specific" promotion. Promotion that focuses on the content of an upcoming episode or installment of a program.
Forward promotion	also known as vertical flow or quarter hour maintenance. These promos are short descriptions of program elements, stories, or music coming up within the next segment, hour, or daypart.
OES	acronym for Optimum Effective Scheduling. OES is a radio scheduling strategy that was developed in the late 1980s by commercial radio researchers Steve Marx and Pierre Bouvard. Radio professionals using OES make calculations that are unique to their stations. Those calculations help the stations air messages often enough within a week for listeners to recall and retain the information.

OES Tolerance	the number of simultaneous OES schedules a station can handle in a week without adding additional promo avails to their broadcast logs.
Targeted OES	used to target promos to the times when target listeners use a station. Targeted OES allows you to air fewer messages while achieving the same result.
Total reach	the total number of people that who hear a message at least once.
Turnover ratio	a figure representing the relative number of times a station "turns over" or cycles through its audience in a week's time. Computed by dividing the station's weekly Cume audience by the station's AQH.
Wasted reach	a number of broadcast airings that falls below the mark of effective reach.

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