

...BULLET POINTS...

After Katrina & Rita, What's Next?

Local radio did a fantastic job responding to recent disasters and it illustrated one of the prime differences between satellite radio and terrestrial radio. Just what did the "talent" on satellite radio do to help the hundreds of thousands of radio listeners in the South who were devastated by hurricane's Katrina and Rita? Anyone...anyone?

Terrestrial radio shined. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised from all parts of the country. Teddy bears, toys, food, clothing, houses, everything imaginable was donated by radio listeners hungry to feel a connection with the effort to help the victims of these latest disasters.

It happens time and time again and, sadly, Rita is not going to be the last natural or manmade disaster to hit some part of the United States or the world. Will the next be another tsunami, a major earthquake, a record setting tornado, or a major terrorist attack? We can't know what the next disaster will be, but we can know one will happen and very likely too soon.

If you are like most radio stations, you may have felt a bit overwhelmed by the response and work involved in raising and distributing money and goods to fellow citizens along the gulf.

Most stations determine their responses to natural or not so natural disasters after they happen. Therefore, much of the relief effort is largely a result of what falls into place during the hectic scrambling that starts within the first 24-48 hours after the scope of what has happened really sinks in.

There is a better way to plan for the next disaster. The key is advance planning. Identify who in your organization has a passion for this type of planning. You probably remember some of them since Katrina is still pretty fresh. They were the ones running around saying before anyone else "Hey, this is bad, we need to be doing something, we are going to look like we don't care, the competition has already raised..."

Tap into these people now. Recruit them and a couple of people in your organization who are wired into the movers and shakers in your community to brainstorm some ways you can more effectively give your listeners what they want most at a time like this.

And what is it they want? They want most to feel DIRECTLY connected to helping someone in the disaster out. Fundraising for the Red Cross or the Salvation Army is an excellent overall way for a big company like Infinity, Citadel or Clear Channel to react and support. But for your morning show or individual station, it's not anywhere near as powerful as it could be.

There are three really great categories of efforts your individual station can do that will be more effective than a PSA every hour urging people to use the Red Cross as the funnel between your listeners and the victims.

The goal of all of these categories is to make YOUR STATION the funnel and may or may not involve the Red Cross or Salvation Army:

1. **Transportation of Goods**
2. **Rescue a victim(s)**
3. **Volunteer on the scene**

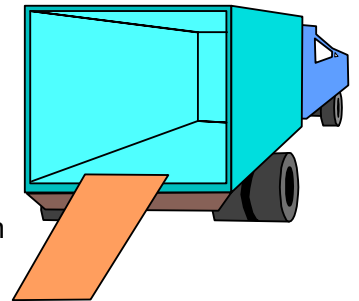
Transportation of Goods

Any radio station can find a truck and a driver and help listeners directly donate to a cause. Listeners like to feel their hands are only one stop away from the victim. When you create the image in a listener's head of "Wow, there goes my teddy bear/gameboy/winter coat and I can see in 1 day a small girl or boy holding my donation and knowing that someone somewhere cares", you've created an emotional bond that no check or credit card donation can match.

Find someone in your town now, with a big truck and a driver, who feel as passionately as you do about making a difference in the next tragedy. Know who they are, research their background and establish someone now that you can trust will do what they say. Look for someone smart enough to push the limit if they need to get the job done. If you wait until the tragedy happens, you run far greater risks of working with the wrong person if you are lucky to find one at all. Have a contact number and ideally a backup driver or two.

Arrange with a local agency now to be your sponsor so cash donations don't have to hit your books and make your corporate lawyers nervous. An umbrella organization/agency can keep any collections under the watchful eye of a respected third party. The big organizations like the Red Cross and Salvation Army frequently only like dealing in cash. Cash is wonderful, but it's not personal. You want to find an organization that can help you make a listener's donation personal.

Do a direct collection for food, toys, clothes, teddy bears and have the photo op with your talent, a truck with your logo full of toys/supplies pulling out of town. This makes for a much more emotionally satisfying donation from your P1 listeners. Your competition may raise \$1,000,000 for a major relief organization which could be 10 times what you raise, but you will be remembered by your listeners as the station that gave them a direct connection and made them a part of the recovery in a way no check donation could help them feel.



This will be especially true three weeks later when the inevitable stories of financial mismanagement and poor decisions on the part of the big relief organizations hit the paper.

As an example, Morning Host Dave Smiley (WZPL Indianapolis) not only got a truck loaded with food and water for a hurricane a couple of years ago, he got in the truck, drove to Florida doing his show on the road talking to victims once he got there. This made much more impact than the other stations back in Indianapolis just taking donations for the Red Cross.

Think outside the box and brainstorm what else people might need beyond food, water and clothing. For example, The Bert Show (Q100 Atlanta) put together thousands of backpacks full of school supplies for the displaced kids after a disaster. J.T. and Kate, WBNS in Columbus, volunteered babysitting services for families who had relocated from the disaster area into Columbus.

Rescue a Victim

Many radio stations and or morning shows around the country got directly involved enough to move a family or adopt a family in one of the devastated areas.

It really doesn't get any better than this. In large part, the stations that did this were either close to the Katrina disaster or got lucky with an email from a listener who knew a family that needed help.

WKZL in Greensboro adopted a family from New Orleans and helped the town of Greensboro, North Carolina become this one family's sponsors. Housing, cars, books, TVs, FM radios, kitchens, and everything this family could have wanted was eagerly donated by merchants and individuals hungry to feel like they were helping and reinforcing their own sense of and pride in Southern hospitality.

This is the type of promotion that made an entire town feel good and got major coverage local EVERYWHERE. To hear an audio clip of Murphy in the Morning on 1075 KZL talking to the family, click here or copy and paste this link into your Internet browser:

<http://www.randylaneco.com/audio/Greensboro/wkzl/9-2005/NewOrleansFamily.mp3>

Volunteer on the scene

The other way to help listeners feel connected to a disaster like Rita or Katrina is to have someone they know and trust to be on the scene helping and calling back with observations they are making. In our spin society today, where there are at least two distinct political interests consistently attacking or defending their ideology, most of our listeners who are not aligned strongly one way or another have a hard time knowing what to believe.

Sending a producer or your biggest morning show host to the area when it's safe to volunteer and having them phone in everyday with the stories of what happens to them, what they are seeing as the real needs of the area is another great way to help listeners feel DIRECTLY connected and a bit more empowered to help than a cash or check donation would otherwise do. When you are talking directly to a victim of a disaster and hearing their story it has ten times the effect of just soliciting funds on the air. It really brings it home to people.



THE PLAN

All three categories are going to be a real part of the next disaster, whether we lose part or all of an area of our country or a neighboring country to a bomb, tornados, an earthquake or ice/snow storm, there will be victims that our listeners are going to want to help.

Have a meeting now with the 3-5 folks in your cluster who have passion around this and some locals who can make things happen. Put those minds together and do an even more effective relief effort than we did this time. Consider talking about this planning on the air to involve the listeners.

Cash donations are great and always help. Donations that make your P1's feel directly connected, not only help the victims, but create a stronger bond and another great memory peg that can't help but pay off in more awareness of your station(s) or show.

Congratulations again to an industry that proved its relevance yet again hands down in this latest round of mass hardship. I'm still waiting for someone to tell me what XM Radio did to help. Maybe they were just too busy amusing themselves with the new four letter words they've learned to say over and over.

Stan Main

The 15% Rule

With all of the emerging new technologies (satellite radio, podcasting, internet streaming to your cell phone, etc.) the competition between these different media will be intense. Talent and memorable content is still the best way to distinguish yourself -- yet in this environment of voice tracking and cyber jocking, many stations have lost the overnight live slot, which was a prime training ground for developing talent and a place to try new things.

So, **talent must be allowed to experiment**, even in morning drive. You need to set up an environment where they are allowed to fail and make mistakes occasionally.

In fact, encourage ALL employees to spend 15% of their time experimenting, doodling, fiddling around on projects of their own. Why? Band-Aids for Johnson and Johnson was the result of an employee experimenting with bandages because his wife kept cutting her fingers cooking. The adhesive on Post Its also came from an employee fooling around. Neither one of these very profitable finds came out of any strategic planning session -- they both came out of experimentation.

The value of this concept for PD's and talent is that experimentation is a key component of the creative process that can directly impact ratings. By encouraging experimentation you may come up with the next War of the Roses or the new Jack format idea and set yourself up to beat or capitalize on some of the new emerging technologies.

Keep these points in mind:

- Listen to anyone with an original idea.
- Encourage, don't nit-pick.
- Encourage experimental doodling.
- Let people run with an idea.
- Take small steps toward something -- give it a try.
- Accept that mistakes will be made.
(If you're particularly nervous about some new idea, put it down on tape first.)
- Hire good people and leave them alone.

"If you put a fence around people you get sheep. Give people the room they need."

-- William McNight, CEO of 3M



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