

BULLET POINTS

HOW MUCH MUSIC SHOULD YOUR MORNING SHOW BE PLAYING?

The evidence is mounting that the majority of listeners do not listen to the radio in the morning for music on foreground formats. This is particularly true with male-targeted radio stations. Most listeners today are listening to radio in the morning to be entertained, energized and informed. The strategy of playing more music in the morning does work for new formats, stations re-establishing their music position, and radio stations and morning shows that aren't out-performing their station average. Playing little or no music in the morning while a station is establishing or re-establishing a music position can impede the overall station mission.

The accessibility of music and the rise in the number of entertaining morning shows, including TV morning shows, has changed listener preferences in the morning. The higher percentage of car usage in the morning in most markets makes it more difficult to build high personality morning shows that play more than a few songs per hour. We hear listeners all over the country say that they don't listen for music in the morning and if they want music, "I'll listen to my I-pod or my CD's."

Music-To-Content Formula

The amount of music played in the morning is directly proportionate to the quality of the content and how the show performs against the station's average ratings. Assuming that your commercial count in the morning is average (12-14 units per hour) use the following song count table as a guide for the number of songs to play.

- Under-performing the station average in the target demo – 8 songs or more per hour
- Near even to slightly above the station average in the target demo – 6 songs per hour
- 10-15% above the station average in the target demo – 3 to 4 songs per hour
- 15-20% above the station average in the target demo – 2 to 3 songs per hour
- 20-30% above the station average in the target demo – no music

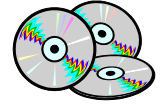
It's best to go incrementally and drop one song at a time to make sure the quality of the content is increasing as the song count decreases. Gradual changes are less noticed by listeners.

The Rule of 3

Morning shows with the talent to be consistently engaging and entertaining (and out-performing the station by at least 15%) can deliver a balanced music, information and commercial set of content to the typical 20 minute in-car commuter with 3 well placed songs per hour. The argument against playing 8 songs an hour in morning drive is three pronged for shows that are outplaying their radio station average.

1. First, the strongest way to increase awareness of your station and encourage listener loyalty is through unique and relatable personalities more so than power currents, re-currents and gold.

2. Secondly, a morning show that has 30 minutes an hour of connect time with the audience is going to become familiar and connect to an audience twice as fast as a show that has 15 minutes of connect time per hour.
3. Thirdly, morning shows frequently have broader appeal than niche music formats.



Personality vs. Product

Does your morning show actually have broader appeal than your music position? Stations with narrow formats like Modern Rock, Classic Rock, Smooth Jazz, and Rhythmic CHR frequently create morning show tune-out for fringe listeners playing vertical appeal songs (songs that are exclusively familiar to the core of that particular format).

The music you play in morning drive ideally would be ONLY THE MOST FAMILIAR multiple format appeal songs that you can possibly play. If your station is Classic Rock, consider forgoing the AC/DC or Rush twofer on Tuesday for the more pop set of songs from 38 Special, ZZ Top or the Eagles.

If you are a modern rocker, cheat on pop and recurrent as much as possible on your morning drive selections. Same for Rhythmic CHR -- be as close to mainstream as possible in morning drive. We have yet to find a station or a format that is well served breaking new music or playing secondary songs on personality morning shows.

Music can be a wonderful part of a morning show. Music gives the show time to regroup and think about stronger content than would be possible with no music bridges. Coming up with 4 hours of morning show banter that's more compelling than your hottest re-current is also a legitimate challenge you can make to your talent.

When Does Music Hurt Time Spent Listening (TSL) In the Morning?

Humor, information and emotionally charged content fuel listening and TSL in the morning on foreground formats. Listeners are tuning in to hear their favorite personalities and the content they deliver.

So, how does music hurt TSL in the morning? When strong morning shows begin attracting listeners from other music formats just to hear the personalities playing a song they don't like will make them switch the station. For example, if the show is on a Classic Rock station and a listener who prefers Rhythmic Top 40 is listening for the morning show, when a Classic Rock song is played that listener will likely tune-out because of the music thereby losing TSL.

A big morning show playing no music will typically cause tune-out only when they go to commercials or when they're doing content that isn't connecting with listeners. A direct format competitor will lose TSL by playing music in this scenario.



Is There Ever a Time to Increase Music In the Morning?

Yes. Other than needing to establish a music position, more music may be needed for shows that are saddled with extraneous talk and/or chitchat that turns off listeners. "They talk too much" means the talk is irrelevant and not connecting on any emotional level. Unfocused shows with lots of idle chatter can be made better by increasing the number of songs played. Then only the strongest content gets on the air. Playing more music can also be used to help talent become better self-editors and improve language efficiency.

The Case For Not Using Music Beds

Running music beds under most all conversations is a Top 40/CHR and Urban radio convention that's designed to increase the perceived energy of an air talent's show and to improve pacing. They are also used to fill in dead spots and dead air in conversations. This strategy still works in many dayparts where the strategy is more music and high energy.

It's amazing how much more intimate air talents sound without a music bed underneath them. Listeners many times don't necessarily notice the beds are gone yet they'll make comments like, "You sound closer -- more like you're sitting down with me talking over coffee."

Discontinue using music beds under conversations on morning shows that are trying to make an emotional connection with listeners. Music beds on personality and content oriented shows with real people are mainly useful only for contest and feature staging.

One of the biggest reasons to reduce the amount of background audio is the potential loss of the pregnant pause. Frequently, the funniest moments on radio shows are the moments when someone is at a loss for words, stumped, fooled, embarrassed, etc. These moments can be buried by too much audio background music.

Air talents accustomed to using beds underneath all the time will initially feel very naked and vulnerable. With time, they will be comfortable without the net of background music to hide behind and their conversations will sound more like two or three people talking would sound.

A big benefit of reducing the amount of audio distractions on the show will be a naturally more adult sounding show with more real sounding people.

Be Quick, But Don't Hurry

This phrase formed the coaching philosophy of legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden. Coach Wooden said, "Life, like basketball, must be played fast – but NEVER out of control. If you hurry, you're more likely to make mistakes; but if you're not quick, you won't get things done."

On the air, it's often a delicate balance between being quick and efficient with language and rushing through things to stay on time with the format clock. Listeners are turned off by rambling talents who take too long to get to the point, yet rattling off an entertainment report too quickly can result in no connection or communication between the talent and the listeners.

Programmers must be flexible enough with format clocks to allow real communication and air talents must Be Quick – But Don't Hurry.



The Randy
Lane
Company

2660 Townsgate Rd. Suite 800 Westlake Village, CA 91361
Randy Lane: (805) 497-7177 Fax: (805) 497-9858 Email: randy@randylane.net
Stan Main: (585) 313-3070 Email: stan@randylane.net