Broadcasting

Community radio: give it a try

If your charity is hoping to extend its media coverage in 2009, give community radio a closer look.

Many news outlets – whether commercial radio, TV or the local press – are suffering declining advertising income and increased competition. But community radio is growing quickly.

Since the first permanent station was licensed in November 2005, Ofcom has granted new licences to 187 different groups, all of them not-for-profit and driven by demonstrable social purposes with business plans that ensure their audiences help to run them.

These stations are run by the people for the people. In some cases they offer a small, geographically focused service, such as Forest of Dean Radio; in others, one aimed at a specific minority, such as Glasgow’s Asian station, Awaz FM.

For charities, community radio stations offer a number of benefits. The most obvious is that they have small but dedicated audiences. If you need to target a group that mainstream media overlook or cater for only in moderation, stations such as Gaydio – aimed at the gay and lesbian community in Manchester – can bridge the gap.

These stations have as much airtime to fill – but fewer resources to draw on – as their commercial or BBC counterparts; so your interview will probably last longer than it would elsewhere, giving you more time to promote yourself and the chance to explore issues in more depth.

Because community stations broadcast to small target audiences, they are also an ideal training ground for junior spokespersons or staff who’ve just completed media training courses and need to put their skills into action. This isn’t to belittle community radio audiences, but nobody wants to be thrown onto the Today programme without getting a bit of experience first.

Finally, community radio stations’ smaller transmission areas make them perfect for local charities – groups that might not want to broadcast on a larger regional or national service. If you’re a small community group working in the Wirral, for example, you won’t necessarily want to go on BBC Radio Merseyside, and you might find you’re geographically too niche for Auntie – but you would be perfect for 7 Waves Community Radio.

No media outlet grants you a god-given right to broadcast coverage, so if you have a community radio station in your area, the usual rules apply. Listen to the station first and tailor your approach so that you offer something that works for both parties. If you can do that, it could be the start of a long and fruitful relationship.

David Radcliffe is the manager for English regions at Ofcom.

Medium and message

A picnic at Heathrow’s terminal one drew attention to Climate Rush’s campaign against airport expansion

Strawberries, anyone?: the campaigners at Heathrow

Campaigning group Climate Rush threw a ‘posh picnic’ at Heathrow Airport earlier this month to protest against domestic flights and the planned expansion of the airport.

About 1,000 protestors, including Green Party MEP Caroline Lucas, converged on terminal one with food hampers and picnic rugs and sat down to eat to the sounds of various musical performances. Some protestors dressed as Suffragettes because Climate Rush was inspired by them.

The group called the event Dinner at Domestic Departures. A similar event – Northern Rush – took place at Manchester Airport at the same time. The stunt was timed to coincide with the day when MP’s returned from their winter holidays.

Amelia Gregory, a spokeswoman for Climate Rush, says dressing as Suffragettes created a striking image and reminded people of successful peaceful protests. “At a time when democracy was failing them, the Suffragettes also chose radical direct action to draw attention to the lack of votes for women.”

Gregory says the nature of the campaign group made it difficult to organise such a large-scale event. “Climate Rush is a totally grass-roots movement and, as such, it has suffered from a lack of funding,” she says. “Because most of us have full-time jobs, it has been hard work to find time to fit everything in, but passion for what we believe in has helped us to draw numerous people into the movement.”

Tamara Hinson

The Seashell Trust provides education and residential care for people with communication difficulties.

Development

Most of the development work for the new site was completed in six weeks and it was launched in March last year. When the organisation was rebranded in November and changed its name from the Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders, the site was updated to reflect the new branding.

Design and content

Overall, the site is innovative and engaging. The home page works well and draws visitors in with its use of colourful tabs and pictures of Seashell Trust beneficiaries laughing and having fun. The site appears to be aimed at anyone who is interested in the charity’s services, particularly families.

Flash animation links at the top of the page, including some shaped like bubble quotes and a piggy bank, are highlighted or move when the cursor is placed over them. These links provide easy access to information on the Seashell Trust’s schools, its adult care services, ways to donate and more. Much of the content is

Site Visit www.seashelltrust.org.uk

Organisation Seashell Trust
Agency Fat Frog
Spend £11,500
Accessibility WAI priority level 2

Navigation 4
Accessibility 4
Innovation 3
Content 4

Special features

The site’s ‘referral details’ section offers information on various kinds of health care affecting communication. Each section contains links to outside organisations or specialists that can offer help.

The Seashell Trust says: “We have had excellent feedback on the site and we are finding it very useful as a tool for keeping in touch with our supporters and agencies that refer students to our services, and for raising donations for the charity.”

Patricio Chile

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