

COMMUNITY RADIO BROADCASTING

Exactly what is Community Radio Broadcasting

A difficult question to give a simple answer to, as stations vary enormously with hardly two exactly alike and depending on the community they serve, be it Indigenous, Youth, Ethnic, RPH, Christian, Muslim, Classical Music, Gay or Lesbian

Some Community Radio Stations are operated by small and dedicated groups of volunteers in isolated communities and some by larger groups in the Provincial and Major Cities

Some stations are well funded and owned by substantial institutions while others are impoverished, operated on a 'Shoestring', and owned by a local volunteer group

What they all have in common is, or should have in common

- Catering for specific community purposes
- Not operated for profit
- Heavy reliance on volunteers
- Broadcasting live programs to Air
- Encouragement for members of the community to be involved
- Involvement of the station with the community and community events
- Support of local and Australian Arts, Music and Culture
- Increase in the choice of programmes available to the community
- Coverage of issues under-represented in other media

Unattended Broadcasting of Networked and Syndicated programs, or Automated presentation to Air using PC based equipment of common 'Hit Parade' music interspersed with automatic scheduled announcements and commercials is well catered for by Commercial Radio Stations and is an economical method to operate a Radio Station as Automation, Networking or Syndication Saves on Wages

The above type of programming, or worse, using a CD Stacker programmed to play music tracks at random as used by some community stations for night programming, is not really acceptable or satisfactory during high audience periods, and is in addition not what Community Radio Broadcasting is about, neither is heavy reliance on Syndicated Programmes taken from Satellite or Land-Line

Excessive use of Syndicated Programmes may also, according to the Broadcasting Services Act, contravene the licence conditions for the station

Community Radio Broadcasting should be 'Live' whenever possible, and presented by a real person broadcasting a variety of material ranging from light entertainment and interesting information to recorded material including items and music not normally heard elsewhere, to an audience of real people

Community Radio Stations rely heavily on volunteers

They are the lifeblood of a Community Radio Station, they all have something to contribute, and should be treated with the respect they deserve

Without volunteers a small community station probably could not exist

In an amateur Theatre Club various volunteer staff are needed for a variety of support functions such as Management, Financial Control, Promotion, Ticket Selling, Ushering, Directing, Costumes, Scenery, Lighting, Sound, Catering and Cleaning, and unfortunately not everyone can be a 'Star' actor

A Community Radio Station is very similar, not everyone can be a 'Star Announcer', and in addition, the operation of the Radio Station depends very heavily on Technical Equipment and Systems to operate Continuously and Reliably round the clock, 365 days of the year

Volunteers are needed in the following areas and not shown in order of importance

- Management
- Financial Control
- Secretarial
- Planning
- Promotion
- Fund Raising
- Technical Engineering
- Technical Maintenance
- Computer Systems
- Training
- Programming
- Direction
- Production
- Library Keeping
- Presenting
- Cleaning
- General Maintenance
- Quality assessment

Every volunteer is of importance and value to the station, and not all can be Presenters

Community Radio Stations are not competing with the Commercial Stations for audience and should concentrate on producing a high standard of Presentation and Audio quality

Presentation should be considered at two distinct levels, one being the Artistic Presentation, the other, Operation of Equipment

Artistic Presentation is very important, but being a Management and Committee issue relating to Taste and Station Policy, outside the scope of this discussion

Proper Equipment Operation and Good Microphone Techniques are also very important if the station is to 'Sound Professional' with training briefly discussed later in this

The Sound Quality of the Station also depends on the Quality of it's Technical Equipment, and that this Equipment is Correctly Installed, Maintained, and Calibrated

Of the volunteer positions within the station, we will here discuss only Technical Engineering, Technical Maintenance, Computer Systems, Training and Quality Assessment

- Technical Engineering (Station Engineer)

This position involves the Technical Planning, Documentation, Technical Record Keeping, Installation and Critical Systems Adjustments and Calibration, such as Audio Operating Levels, Audio Processing, Modulation Levels and etc and is normally done in Commercial Radio Stations by the Station Chief Engineer, or by a Chartered Engineer brought in as required

Being in charge of Technical Engineering is a position carrying a high degree of responsibility and is best done by a qualified technical person with serious and recent experience in Radio Broadcasting

Transmission Quality, Technical Reliability and general smoothness of the technical operation of the station is entirely in his hands

The person in charge of Technical Engineering must preferably be permanent and for the sake of technical consistency of the station, not be subjected to committee changes

He can be a suitably qualified volunteer, a paid staff member, or an outside expert contractor brought in as and when required

- Technical Maintenance (Technician)

Technical Maintenance, can be carried out by the Station Engineer or by suitably trained volunteers under his direct supervision

- Computer Systems (Volunteers and Station Engineer)

General Office Computer Systems, can be set up and maintained by volunteers who are considered to be suitably skilled by the station management and is not generally of concern to or the responsibility of the Station Engineer

Computer Systems used for Audio Recording, Audio Editing, Audio Storage, Audio Delivery, Automation and Program Logging is the direct responsibility of the Station Engineer

Any work, program upgrades, program installations, set-up changes etc on the station Audio Computer Systems may be done only with the knowledge and consent of the Station Engineer

Actual work on the Audio Computer Systems, may be carried out by volunteers under his supervision

- Training (Volunteers or Formal Training)

Proper Training of On-Air Presenters and Production People is very important if the station is to sound professional

General presentation and microphone techniques can be taught to novice presenters and production people 'In-House' by the more experienced volunteers, or by attending a suitable Radio School or Training Academy

Technical skills such as Equipment Operation, Audio Level Keeping, Audio Computer Systems Operation, Emergency Procedures etc can also be taught 'In-House' by volunteers having the required technical knowledge

- Quality Assessment (Volunteers)

Regular assessment of Presentation Standards and Transmission Quality, and is very important to any Radio Station

Presentation Standards, apart from Poor Equipment Operation and Microphone Techniques, is not a technical Issue being largely a subjective station policy matter for Station Management and Committee to correct and not discussed further here

Assessing Transmission Quality is usually best done by station volunteers regularly listening to the station from their homes, using high quality Radio Tuners and Hi-Fi Equipment

Listen for Transmission Flaws such as Noise, Distortion, Clicks, Hum, Channel Balance, Audio Levels, Frequency Response Balance, Squashed Sound caused by Over Compression etc

Compare the sound of your station with the ABC Classical, or other stations with known good Transmission Quality, not JJJ Please, and report perceived problems in a nice way to the Station Management or Committee who will want your station to be the best sounding in the area

Equipment and the installation can develop subtle faults, Operating Levels can be wrongly adjusted, Presenters and Production People may not operate the equipment to the correct levels, and very commonly, the settings of the Audio Processor has been interfered with

As mentioned earlier in this, volunteers are the lifeblood of the station, and not everyone can be a 'Star Presenter'

Treat all volunteers with the respect they deserve, listen to them, allow them to do needed tasks for the station, get them involved in projects and help promote harmony within the station