

Content Strategy for Community Radio

KIRON BANSAL

For the success of any medium, content holds the key. In the case of Community Radio, it is all the more important in view of its specific nature, scope and objectives. As we are aware, a community radio is people's radio which reflects the hopes, concerns and aspirations of a community. Covering a small geographi-

cal area of not more than 15-20 km. radius, it works on the premise of the citizens' 'right to disseminate knowledge'; the citizens' 'right to know'. It aims to initiate development from the grassroots and bring in the voices of the excluded to the centre. To develop a sustainable content strategy

for a community radio station, some factors need to be considered.

Audience Profile

Like any other form of media, content planning for community radio cannot be made in isolation as it has to cater to the needs of the community it

aims to serve. Thus, the first question a community radio broadcaster has to answer is - Content for whom? Who the community members are? What is their demographic profile (in terms of distribution of age, gender, income levels, occupation, educational levels)? What types of media options are available to the people - do they have access to newspapers, radio or television? What kind of folk media are being used? In addition, it is equally important to ascertain the kind of environment in which the local community is placed - the climate, type of landholding and the crops produced and so on.

Development Status

Apart from the audience profile, a good understanding of the development indices in a community such as health, education, economic status, agriculture, rural development etc. will be required. The community may also be confronting some day-to-day civic problems or those related with law and order, irrigation, sanitation, water distribution among others. Some of these issues can be taken up in the programming with an aim to address them.

In case the programmers are from the community itself, they will have some understanding about the local issues and problems. However, if they are from outside and represent any agency/organization etc., then it would be desirable for them to interact with the local community members, field functionaries and senior offi-

cials to thoroughly understand and identify the concerns of the community. In any case, regular interactions with the community members will always be required to develop a sustainable strategy for content generation.

'Needs' and 'Wants'

Among the various types of needs, a radio programmer has to keep in view the felt or expressed needs and the latent needs of a community while planning the content. Felt needs are those which a person is able to identify and articulate oneself while latent needs are those which a person or community may not be aware of but requires for its growth, progress and development. An analysis of both types of needs will help to identify the 'real' need of the community for effective programming of a station. Focus group discussions (FGDs) which give an in-depth view of an issue have been found useful tools for assessing the needs and wants of a community as compared to the survey method which gives a 'big picture'.

Specific Issues

Yet another important area which merits consideration is a focus on specific issues being faced by a community. For example, we all are aware that health is an important development indicator which needs adequate reflection in radio programming. But health being a broad area; it will be useful for the programmer to narrow it down to the specific health needs of a community for optimal



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impact of the programming. It is possible that a village may be afflicted with any disease like gastroenteritis, chicken pox or dengue fever requiring immediate attention. In such a scenario, it makes little sense to discuss health problems of far off places such as encephalitis or swine flue. The local health functionaries, doctors, officials etc. may be involved in imparting relevant information to contain the spread of the disease.

Linkages

The above example brings us to a very relevant question - should the programming of a community radio station be confined to the local issues only or offer some scope for projecting larger national issues as well? It would be useful for a community radio to pick up some important issues projected in the mainstream media having bearing on their lives and interpret them with the local perspective. In this way, it will make the community aware of the national issues and broaden their horizons to help them bring into the mainstream of life.

Positive in Nature

The content of a community radio can contribute in making people aware about their rights and responsibilities and can serve as an effective tool to foster communal harmony and national integration. The content planner needs to be careful about hidden propaganda, controversial and contentious subjects that may conflagrate conflicts

and tensions among people. This, however, does not imply that a community radio station shuns real issues - far from it, it is rooted in reality and to meet the objectives of social responsibility, its primary aim is resolution of a problem rather than its aggravation.

Entertainment

Yet another crucial area for content planning is that of entertainment. It is often argued that since the objectives of community radio are information and education, there is hardly any scope for entertainment in it. Even if there is, it is limited to folk songs and folk music. However, community radio programming need not be dull and boring; otherwise it will lose its inherent strength to draw people to its fold. Fun and games are part and parcel of our lives and there is no need to ignore or shy away from them. Even broadcast of film music may also be considered in this regard. What is important is to maintain a judicious balance between information, education and entertainment in the content planning.

Formats

Apart from the basic formats like talks, discussions and interviews, a community radio station can also make use of drama, quiz and phone-ins (the latter in case telephone facility is easily available). In different areas, local festivals, melas and exhibitions are organized from time to time which witness active participation from

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special skills and talents in singing, storytelling, dramatics, gardening and even cookery. They may use the forum to share their own success stories - how they have faced the odds in their lives and overcome them - to inspire and motivate other community members.



artists of different art forms or genres. Their interviews can serve as a rich source of content. Since community radio operates on low budgets, it would be useful to broadcast more live programmes to minimize the need for recording and editing.

Local Talent

To emerge as a true representative of a community, a community radio station has to give ample scope for local talent in its content planning. Local people may share their

For developing a sustainable content strategy for a community radio station, some of the issues discussed above may be kept in view. If a radio station is able to voice the needs and hopes of the community and address their concerns by actively involving the people themselves then it leads to a marked improvement in their quality of lives. Thus the goal of community radio is achieved.

Dr Kiron Bansal is associated with Community Radio Academic Program at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). She can be contacted at kbansal@ignou.ac.in