

Media's underdog

■ Despite broad advances in the technology, radio has proven it will survive the test of time

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

At the time radio was invented, families would sit around their tuners nightly, listening to their favorite programs. But today, with an abundance of media competing for the attention of audiences, radio has been pushed to the background.

"Everyone listens to the radio, but they're not paying attention to it," said Jim Davis, program director for KKNU in Eugene.

What people are paying attention to are more visual media such as television and the Internet. One might think that radio would get phased out by these more advanced forms of entertainment. But it is the grassroots nature of radio that maintains its vitality.

"The one thing that radio has that none of those other media have is it can still be your companion," said Davis.

If you think about it, the radio is always on. It wakes you up on your alarm. It's on in the background at work. It's in the car. But it takes a distinctive personality to further break it into the foreground.

"You don't have personalities, you don't have a station," says Bonnie Keene, marketing personnel for KDUK and KPNW, two popular local stations.

"DJs are our most important asset. They are the people who interact with listeners," says Autumn Depoe, programming director and DJ for KWVA, the campus radio station. "With our station, we have people there 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

As long as there is someone at the station, there is someone to talk to. A person can't call up his or her television station and be on the air, or win an Internet contest by placing one phone call.

"Contests on the telephone are the greatest thing in the world," Davis said.

Davis' reasoning for this is that these contests allow people to feel as if they are a part of something. It serves as immediate gratification. Davis speculated that sometimes people just want to talk to someone

else. Radio can support this listener interaction for only one reason: It remains local.

"That's going to be radio's savior," Davis said.

Stations such as KWVA have the freedom to play local music, exposing the public to artists and at the same time letting listeners know

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KKNU

where they can see the artist perform.

"We are the station in Oregon that is prime for new music," Depoe said.

The radio is also an immediate source for local news, sports events, traffic information and other snippets that a national medium cannot supply.

Technological advances have moved other competing media forward in their ability to communicate, but they have not forgotten radio.

"People who design stereos aren't going to stop putting radio bands on their products," Davis said.

Technology has also allowed tuners to become smaller and more portable with better reception. Even a radio that has a hand-cranked generator has been invented, eliminating the need for batteries.

The mobility of radio is enough to give it an edge over larger media, and when you consider the fact that the radio is 100 percent free to listeners, this particular medium can sound pretty enticing.

One other leap radio has taken to is streaming on the Internet. While online broadcasting is not the main focus of the station, the Internet stations are reaching out to new listeners all over the country. Also, if devoted listeners are out of the normal reception area, they can still find out exactly what is going on in their hometowns.

Think of radio as the underdog in the race of greyhounds on the track of the 21st century. As of now, it's still a pretty good bet.



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