

The changing face of station voices

When it comes to your station, how do you sound? Do you speak with one voice or many?

That may seem like an odd question but it goes to the heart of an important element of your overall image—your station voice or, as is becoming more and more the case, station voices.

Like many things in broadcasting, the use of a single “voice of God” for a station is changing. There seems to be a trend these days to use a collection of announcers with different sounds for different programs and programming blocks.

“I feel like if I see two or three promos back-to-back and it’s the same voice, I think there’s much more of a tune-out factor,” says Brian Dollenmayer, senior vice president of on-air promotion and creative marketing for the Fox Television

Network. “If you start hearing the same person talk to you all night long you may start to pay less attention.”

But how does that affect overall station image if you have different voices?

“From our standpoint, Fox has so many different faces,” said Dollenmayer. “We’ve got cutting edge dramas, the irrelevant animation block, reality shows. So to have the same voice on all the promos doesn’t have the same impact. I think the way people watch television these days is that they watch programs and not networks (stations) necessarily. We try to use whatever voice we feel sells that show. But regardless of the voice, there’s still a (consistent) attitude.”

Fox has a regular stable of about six announcers and will experiment with different voices for specific spots. But Dollenmayer says it’s not just big networks that are experimenting with the traditional single station-voice concept.

“It’s kind of getting away from that in terms of that one-voice person that you use,” says Jeff Clemons, director of marketing and creative services for Channel 39, KIAH-TV Houston, TX, a CW network affiliate. “We have two primary voices and we have a stable of other people that we can access (for specific projects).”

With hundreds of channels to choose from, not to mention other media platforms vying for the same eyeballs, Clemons says station voices need to stand out like never before.

“To me what’s happening in the industry currently is that people are moving away from the big booming “voice of God” voice and it’s really getting into a niche kind of voice that people are looking for,” he says. “A lot of local broadcasters are starting to niche program now. They’re targeting all their on-air product and their news product in a certain direction. So you’re going to want a voice person who will have appeal to that audience. The main thing (you look for in a voice) is you have to be able to cut through the clutter out there.”

Dollenmayer agrees.

“Your voice should stand out. It



should be easy to listen to. It shouldn’t sound forced. It needs to sound like a real person that you can have a connection with. There really are no rules of what your voice should be.”

“It sounds cliché, but it’s almost like the YouTube generation is permeating through, where ordinary people are (broadcasting)” adds Clemons. “It’s plain speak, an everyday sound. That’s where (things) are going right now.”

“We are in a YouTube world these days,” concurs Dollenmayer. “Not everything is polished. It’s more relaxed in promotion. To take that approach with your announcer is sometimes a good idea too.”

While a voice is only one component of a station’s overall image, it is an important one. Watch a typical teen or 20-something watch TV and chances are they’re also on the computer and/or texting at the same time. In other words, they may not have their eyes glued to the screen. If the voice helps them know who they are watching, then it has done its job.

But if you close your eyes and flip around the dial and can’t tell when you’ve landed on your station by just listening, that may not be a good thing.

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