

Live in Ten!

by Chet LaPrice

When there are 10 seconds until the next scheduled talk break, radio people fall into one of two categories. If you are prepared and ready, have rehearsed your “rap,” made it relevant and compelling, cleared the studio of everybody not directly involved with this portion of your show, have your “out” crafted so you will not ramble, know what your next element will be directly after you finish, have your headphones on, are excited, and open with your station’s slogan and name...congrats! You are prepared to make your station a winner.

However...if you have been texting, chatting with studio visitors, or surfing--and are now caught unawares--you have two choices. One, skip the break—meaning you have just forfeited your moment on the stage and a chance to connect with your audience. Two, ramble through it. Brace yourself...

(Song fades, dead air..., click of mic, background studio noise) “Uhm...okay.... That was... (silence, mic boom creaks as it swings) uhm, the computer’s not really telling me, so... I guess it was pretty cool. What do you guys out there think? Call me and let me know (does not give phone number out). So, yeah, THIS IS (show name, delivered in an ominous/over-modulated tone)... What? (off-mic comment) (laughs) Yeah, good one! So, we have a giveaway... uhm, the binder should be here... Well, we’ll figure it out...”

Have you ever heard yourself, or others, do this? I have, and it was once me. When I listened to that aircheck, I strove to *never* do that again. Some tips I’ve learned over the years, working in both commercial and college radio:

1. Besides headphones, *always* show-up with a notebook and a pen.
2. Arrive at least 15-20 minutes early and scan your program log. Know how many talk breaks you have during your show, and plan a specific break for each of them. Where are you going to talk-up the giveaway? The concert coming to town? The event on campus? What’s coming-up on the next show or the morning show tomorrow? Cross-promoting your social media platforms? Your billboard for your next hour of music? Jot some notes into the log or in your notebook, and *practice* them during music sweeps. Solo or partner shows, this works wonders. Then, *do* them—and don’t deviate from your script! You’ll be amazed how confidently and enthusiastically your talk break flows.
3. If you program all of your own music, that should be done already. We all know the “specialty show” that runs from 9pm-Midnight with the jock that blows-in at 9:03, throws a random CD in, and starts with, “Ohhhkayyyy... hi, guys, we’ve got some music here...” That’s not preparing. That doesn’t sound good.
4. “What else do I talk about? Where can I get good showprep?” It’s important to find things that the audience finds compelling. If you are doing a music show, tell me about the artists! Wikipedia is great for this, and Pollstar lists concert dates. Any coming near you? Give it a mention. (In fact, have your promotions director contact the venue to see if they can “comp” you some tickets for giveaways). I love DenofGeek.com, and if you scroll through the newsfeed

on Facebook you can see what topics are trending and what your friends are talking about. Those things can be worked-into a fun bit.

5. Unless specifically relevant to the show, avoid discussions of sex, politics, or religion. These topics always polarize, especially if the listener is not prepared for them. Audience expectation is key!
6. *One thought per break.* If you talk-up the concert, don't also bring-up the basketball game—save that for another time. And sometimes, less is more—station name, backsell, frontsell. If you're stuck for content (we've all been there), keep it moving.
7. If you find yourself getting-ready to say "So," or "Anyway," STOP! End your break. It's always better to leave them wanting more.
8. Be positive! Too much snark or negativity leaves a detrimental impression on your listener.
9. *You.* Not "You out there" or "You guys listening." *You.* Radio is personal and intimate.

We have both a sober responsibility and a magic opportunity to represent our academic institutions. Let's make good first impressions and compel listeners to come back! Too, there's a unique quirkiness to the noncommercial end of the dial, where many of us reside. Like vinyl, music buffs seek us out just to see what's there. As we strive "up our game," college radio as a whole improves. If we are fun both in the studio and in front of the speaker, that reflects positively on your organization.

Hope to see you in Manhattan this coming March!

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