



Remote Control

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Here in the 21st century, most Program Directors have grown accustomed to the fact that rules that once applied to remote broadcasts (two per week, one weekday, one weekend) have gone the way of the cart machine. The fact is that stations are all doing more remotes. Programmers have argued that a host of remotes would increase the perception of clutter, but their case is difficult to prove. Meanwhile, GMs have determined that a Boom Box/Thunder Truck/Winnebago is only worth having if it doesn't sit in the station parking lot five days a week. The pressure is on PDs to work with Account Executives to find profitable ways to keep the promotional fleet on the street. As remotes multiply, new ways to package the events pop up, including shorter appearances with fewer live breaks. How can radio make multiple remotes draw, and be sure that the increase in live broadcasts doesn't lead to a decrease in audience?

We'll stick our Marti out and suggest that the answers have less to do with how many remotes a station airs and more to do with the effect the remotes have on the sound of your station. It's one thing to be stuck on the same car lot each weekend hawking close out prices and free hot dogs. It's another thing to make those broadcasts *events*. A P1 listener will tire of hearing the same messages repeated every Saturday. But if the remote sounds exciting, no live break should have any more negative impact on listening than a sixty-second recorded commercial.

The most important aspect of getting the remote to sound right is to choose talent that gives a damn. Many jocks show up 15 minutes before the broadcast, spend little time with the client, rely on the Sales rep to tell them what to say, and then rattle off cliches ("come on down, we're having a great time"). Combat this apathy by having your jock accompany the Account Exec on a client visit a few days before the event. Make sure they take notes on what will be "sold," then return to the station and write two or three spots, as if they were producing sixty-second commercials. With this ammunition, your jock can rotate pieces of pre-timed copy during the broadcast.

If the client is one who likes to grab the mic and take charge of the breaks, the advance trip will tip off your jock if the star-struck client is planning on mic time. Plan for it by choosing breaks that the client will participate in. Show up for the broadcast with prepared copy, including the breaks the client is assigned to. If at all possible, don't relinquish control of the mic on those breaks.



There is no reason that a jock should deliver more than what is necessary during a remote broadcast. Would you allow 75 second recorded commercials to air that were logged as 60s? A diligent Program Director should maintain the integrity of the live breaks as aggressively as you would what comes from the production studio.

There are two effective ways to keep the live breaks close to the designated time. The second best idea is to create a 55-second remote music bed that plays from the studio as the live break begins. When the jock doing the remote hears the music end, they know to wrap up quickly.

However, the best way to keep the breaks to sixty seconds is to pre-record them. Why does “live” have to be *live*? Turn your board op into a remote producer and have them record each “live” break with the remote talent five to ten minutes before it airs. If something goes wrong, the break can be re-recorded or digitally edited before airing.

PDs often feel they are being fair when they rotate paid remote hosting duties among their announcers. But, are those PDs being fair to the clients and listeners? The concern from Sales is getting the right talent in front of advertisers. Client and money issues aside, a weekend overnigher struggling through a car remote is a negative anyway you hear it. Your job as PD (read as “quality control”) is to make the best radio whenever possible. Spreading the wealth may not be in the station’s best interests. Rotate the top jocks, designate certain clients that are comfortable with the second tier of announcers, then train a “weekend warrior” that can be counted on as a remote specialist. Insist that every staff member working the remote wear station logo apparel. This should not be negotiable. Some of the greatest brands in America (UPS, McDonalds) are supported by their uniforms.

Yet to be addressed is how to promote these events on air. Conventional wisdom says “five liners per day, three days before the event.” PDs faced with a heavier load of remotes are concerned about a heavier load of promos as well. An effective way to make appearances sound bigger and manage promo inventory is to combine remote mentions in “what’s happening this weekend” promos along with other station activities. Update promos each day throughout the week. By including live broadcast mentions in the same promos with theme weekends and major contests, you add more excitement to the events. If multiple broadcasts are planned for the week, record an appropriate number of promos for each and rotate accordingly. Would the event benefit from more mentions beforehand in exchange for a shorter remote or fewer breaks late in the event? Debate this logic with the appropriate Account Exec and client.



The bottom line on “broadcasting live” is that you will do more of it in the months ahead than you ever have before. The client won’t always spend time coming up with ways to make the broadcast exciting. Increase your “remote control.” Challenge yourself, the Sales reps and announcers to make each broadcast an event. Conceive it, choreograph it and control it as you would any major contest or theme weekend. You might not shudder when the next live broadcast order crosses your desk!

