MAC 341: RADIO AND TV PROGRAMME WRITING

PROGRAMME SCHEDULING STRATEGIES

Broadcast Programming or scheduling is the practice of arranging television or

Radio programnes on a daily, weekly, or season-long sequence. Programme

Scheduling strategies are employed to give programmes the best possible chance of attracting and retaining an audience. They are also used to deliver programmes to audiences when they are most likely to want to watch and expose members to advertisers messages. The practice is use to schedule programmes to build an audience for a new show, retain audience, or compete with other stations programmes.

Station schedule progranmme in a particular time for the following reasons:

• To maximize the size of an audience targeted by advertisers

• To attract audience for the programme;

• To give the programmes the best chance to survive or be accepted by its target audience;

• To match programmes with target audience available at the time; and Deliver audiences to advertisers in the composition that makes their advertisements most likely to be effective.

Sources of Radio and Television Programmes

A radio station generates its programmes either internally or externally. Internally generated programmes are those programmes that are developed and produced by the local staff of a station or network while externally generated programmes are those developed in collaboration with other producers.

Internally Produced Programmes

Internally produced programmes refer to those programmes put together by the local staff of a broadcast station as well as those produced by the staff of a network. In this regard, programmes produced by Metro FM in Lagos as well as those produced by Radio Nigeria Network are regarded as internally produced programmes.

Externally Produced Programmes

Independent producers: These are independent producers who come up with programmes like drama, soap Opera, discussion and talk shows as a means of livelihood. These producers may syndicate their programmes to interested stations. They buy air time from stations but source funds from sponsors of the programme.

Religious programmes: Some stations are accepting religious programmes from sermons, live crusades and magazine programmes.

Reality shows: the trend world over is reality TV, and Nigeria is not left out.Today, programmes like Maltina dance hall. Nigeria idol, the Voice, MTN Project Fame among others command good number of audience across the nation.

Live shows/coverage: stations like Lagos Television (LTV 8) organizes Ileya festival, Christmas carnival. Musical shows et cetera to fill the air and also source for funds. Although these programmes are seasonal, they are planned (depending on when the event occur) to fall into the station's quarterly scheduling of programmes.

TYPES OF PROGRAMME STRATEGIES

Flow/Stacking: is a technique used to develop audience flow by grouping together programmes with similar appeals to "sweep" the viewer along from one Programme to the next. This strategy revolves round audience of broadcast programmes; the idea is for audience of a particular programme to flow from one programme to another. For audience to flow into another programme, the station must be ready to schedule its programmes with similar appeal together.

Block programming: station schedules programmes back-to back for a period of time to retain viewership. Scheduling programmes in blocks to make audience flow forward to later programmes is not necessarily because of the first programme appeal but because the audience wants to see the following programme from the beginning.

Hammock: in this strategy, a weaker or new programme is sandwiched between two popular programmes. The intention is to make the audience watch the new or weak one after the first popular progranmme while he awaits the next popular programme.

This strategy is good for two reasons:

• Firstly, the strategy is good for introducing new programmes to the viewing/listening audience. Once it has gained acceptance, it can stand on its own.

• Secondly, a weak programme can eventually pick up and gain more viewership/listenership and even attract sponsorship.

Cross programming: Cross programming involves the interconnection of two shows. This is achieved by extending a storyline over two episodes of two different programmes.

Bridging: is used when a station tries to prevent the audience from changing channels during a junction point- the main evening breaks where all channels stop programmes and shift gear. This is achieved in a number of ways including: having a programme already underway and something compelling happening at a junction point, running a programme late so that people 'hang around' and miss the start of other programmes, or the next programme during the credit of the previous.

Counter programming: involves offering an alternative programme to the audience from the one the competitor is offering. The strategy involves targeting a secondary demographic group that is not being served by competing stations in a particular time period. The implication of this is that the station must know what the other station is offering so as to know the part of the audience that is neglected.

Stunting: is a programming strategy a station adopts in which it offers the audience a special programme in order to draw audiences away from what other competitors are offering them.

Day parting: most talk shows are scheduled for day time this is because they are geared towards a particular demographic group. Most day time talk shows target women, youth and singles, the reason for this is that it is the period of time they are available, Thus, day parting involves dividing the day into several parts, and different radio/television programmes appropriate for each day part are aired.

Stripping: this strategy involves running the same show in the same slot every day of the week so as to retain viewership. NTA 2 channel 5 at a time had the 7:30 belt from Monday through Friday in which for about 90 minutes air comedies. For that slot, NTA 2 is assured that its viewers are there and waiting Monday to Friday.

Again, this works in favour of both the station and advertisers. The station can use his to attract sponsorship, and in any case advertisers are ready to air their messages on a station they know people are viewing.

Hot switching: In hot switching the station eliminates any sort of commercial break. When one programme ends and another begins: this immediately hooks the audience into watching the next programme without a chance to change the television channel between programmes.

Tent pole programming: This strategy is similar to hammock programming in that a programme is sandwich in between two. However in the case of tent pole programming, a very strong programme with high followership is sandwich between two weak programmes. The essence of this strategy is to make people watch the first weak programme while they await the popular programme, and of course most people will stay with the first weak one so as not to miss the interesting programme. Also, programmers hope that by the time the interesting programme ends, some may stay around to watch the second weak programme. In other words, programmers bank on the strength of the central programme to draw viewers to the two other weak shows.

THE 4P'S OF PROGRAMMING

The components of the broadcast programming are classified into four headings, namely: planning, production, placement and promotion the components are discussed below.

PLANNING

Planning is an attempt to force future situation and plan towards it. It refers to how programmes re generated and transmitted on air waves. A broadcast station cannot plan without first putting the audience, the marketing potential, advertisers and sponsorship into consideration. Programme planning involves several steps and these include:

Concept: Is when idea comes up to produce any programme. The idea is nurtured and developed; thereafter the programme objectives are set bearing in mind the type of audience the programme is made for and how it will benefit them as a member of the public.

Programme funding: This usually involves the management. This is because once a programme is developed, the management is fund for the hire of equipment and production expenses.

Scripting: This is the stage when the storyline is actualized into shooting script, director's or producer's script as well as for the artistes.

Cast: This includes those who will take part in the production. Their function is to interpret the script meaningfully into action or voice that will be recorded for either live or recorded programmes.

Production: This involves the technical crew, cast, director, and the producer. They all must play their part in the production so as to achieve the set objectives.

PRODUCTION

Operation or production in broadcast involves the way programmes are produced and projected to the audience in a favorable manner in the overall public interest. There are a variety of programme that makes air on a daily basis on television. Some make it to prime time, some are a product of syndication and some died even after the first episode. The reason programmes succeed or fail lie in the production process. These processes are pre-production, product and post-production. These are discussed below

The pre-production stage: The pre-production stage is generally the conceptualization stage – a stage where everything that will ensure a successful production is identified and put in place. Pre-production is the first stage of television production. This is when scripts are written, story lines are crafted and a storyboard is developed. Producers will do research, location scouting, casting and budgeting. Actors will rehearse and the director will plan his approach. This is more or less a planning stage, making sure that all the elements are in place for production and post-production. A timeline will be established and producers will coordinate different elements of both production and post-production to ensure the most efficient workflow.

The Production Stage: The production stage actually meant you are ready to start rolling the tapes. The script guides both the cast and crew with the strong monitoring from the director. Production could be shot in the studio and it may be a remote area production. When it is an outside location, the site selected must be in consonance with what the script says. But beyond that, it means also making sure that all the equipment needed is available.

The Post Production Stage: Post-production or the evaluation stage includes ensuring that the recorded programme falls within the allotted time adding inserts arranging the visuals in a proper sequence, credits at both the beginning and at the end of the programme as well as taking stock of the budget. The post production level can occur after production or simultaneously during production, depending on the planned approach for workflow.

PLACEMENT

In scheduling programmes the director of programmes must, along with is supporting staff make the decision on how to arrange programmes in such a way that each will have available audience and potential sponsors. In arranging programmes, the unit must ask the following question as well as provide answers to the:

1. Which programme should be placed first and why?

2. Which programme should come next and why?

3. Which programme should come after and why?

4. What time of the day should the programme be aired and why?

5. Who are the audience of the programme and when are they likely to be around?

An honest answer to these question will help the programmed department take the decision on which programmes comes first, which should come in the middle and which should come last. Again, knowing which audience view or listen to what will aid the smooth placement of programmes however knowing the demographics of the audience will assist the department of the time scheduling.

PROMOTION

When a new programme is produced broadcast stations employ various means to create awareness for the programme. The idea is to continually promote the programme before it start showing and even the programme start showing. The idea is to sell the programme to the target audience and possible sponsor(s). Promotion allows businesses (by extension broadcast media) to reach out to consumers (audience) using various forms of techniques and strategies to capture their attention.

The following strategies can be used to promote programme and create acceptance:

Tent pole programming: in tent pole strategy the programmers use a well-known series to sell new programmes that have not gain acceptance. The idea is to put a one strong programme in between two weak programmes. Their belief is that audience would watch the first new programme while waiting for the favourite programme and would probably watch the second new programme.

Hammock: In this strategy a new programme is sandwiched between two popular programmes. The intention is to make the audience watch the new or weak one after the first popular programme while he awaits the next popular programme.

Featuring cast in other programmes: when a station has a new show starting, or it it needs to boost its ratings, part of its cast will be featured in other programmes in the same station, inserted in the dynamics of the programme they are in such programme they can feature that will endeared the personalities of the cast to the audience include participating in game shows, be interviewed by the journalists of the station, make cameos in a series, substitute for the usual staff of other shows in their habitual functions, etc. Once audience falls in love with their personalities they would want to follow their characters in the new programme they are being featured. Again, while appearing on other shows, it is important that the hosts of the shows mention repeatedly the new show and its time slot, trying to encourage their own viewers to watch it.

SCHEDULING AND COMPETITION

Every broadcast station wants to remain in business as well as make profit. This can be achieved if the station is able to deliver the audience to advertisers. This is done if programmes match the characteristics of the target audience. In addition to that, it is important for a station to be aware of what its competition is offering its audience so as to counter the station with better programmes as well as having a better share of the market to attract advertisers and sponsors to the station.

PROGRAMME DEPARTMENT AND ORGANIZATION

The production and arrangement of a station's programme into daily, weekly, monthly quarterly schedule is the job of the programmes department. The structure of the department differs from one

station to another, but generally speaking the structure sometimes depends on the budget of each station.

General Manager

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Manager Programmes

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Principal Producer

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Senior Producer
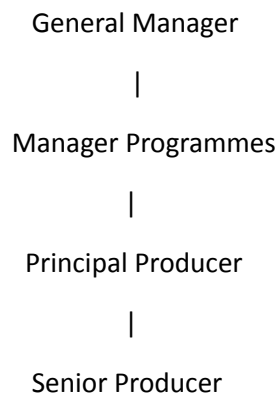
Manager Programmes: the manager of programmes is the head of the programmes department activities and staff. He reports directly to the general manager of the station. His role is to supervise all operations and staff who work under the unit. He is also responsible for supervising all programmes produced in his department. As part of his function, the manager of programmes department also do:

• Monitor staff from controller to senior producers, editor, cameramen, sound recordist and announcers attached to the department;

• He ensures on a daily basis that rosters for the day's shift are properly executed;

• He ensures that all production is guided by the principle of decency, and unity:

- He that all commercials for sponsored programmes and other spot; announcements are aired at the appropriate time; and

• He monitors the days programme

Controller of Programmes: the controller of programmes role is to assist the manager of programmes especially in the training of the programme staff and the supervision of programmes schedule. As part of his duties, the controller of programmes also monitors the movement of staff and common facilities in the department.

Principal Producer: he is responsible for the efficient operations and development of programme type in the following ways:

• Assisting with the training of junior programme staff;

• Monitoring relevant programmes and conducting post mortems;

•Keeping abreast of programme materials and markets for the production centre.

Senior Producer: a broadcast senior producer is responsible for the day to day operational efficiency and high standard programming by producing and presenting programmes staff training schemes. He is also to do among other functions:

• Keep register of performing artiste;

• Co-ordinate the activities of producers;

• Liaise with engineering or production department for production facilities.

As interesting as some programmes are, they may not have the desired effect. If radio/TV programme directors did not place them in the time slot when the target audience will be available to watch. To ensure that the target audience is waiting to watch a programme, the station must know the type of audience the programme is meant for; the time suitable for the programme; and the programme the competitor is offering at the same time.