

5 FEBRUARY 2015 - 10:09AM | POSTED BY [NICOLA GILBERT](#) | 0 COMMENTS

Why radio advertising deserves more of marketers' budgets

She's a tough old boot that radio. Every decade seems to offer her competition in the form of new technology, but she never fails to transform and bounce back.

Since commercial radio broadcasting first exploded into our lives in 1920, it has been one of the constants in the way we receive information and entertainment. To this day, radio has an unparalleled ability to create debates, make us cry, laugh out loud and educate us.

You might assume that, in the multi-device digital age, radio would be drowning. However, this is very far from being the case. Audio content and radio stations are doing better than ever before, as the rise of podcasts such as Serial – the fastest ever to reach 5m downloads and streams globally – have demonstrated in spades.

So why does it continue to thrive? Radio has taken advantage of what the digital age has to offer. In parallel to the existing FM stations, the opportunity to stream internet stations from around the globe has proved popular. Listeners have the choice of literally thousands of stations, from general pop music to very targeted speech and music shows. You then have DAB radio which has had relative success and has a growing listenership.

Over the last decade the popularity of podcasts has grown. The serialisation of audio shows, and the ability to download and listen to your favourite radio programmes on the go, have proved very successful. This, alongside tools such as BBC iPlayer Radio, reflects a world where we have both a choice and the ability to not miss a thing.



Nicola Gilbert



MODERN MARKETING

However, despite all this exciting and extremely well-targeted content, it feels as if the standard of the radio commercial creative has been left behind.

I listen to a lot of radio, and I am finding it hard to recall a good commercial, let alone a great one that has been on air of late. As an industry professional I'm always listening out for the ads, but I find my brain drifting off and creating my to do lists until a punchy track interrupts my thoughts.

It seems I am not the only one. At 2014's Eurobest awards, no Gold or Grand Prix was awarded in the radio category. There have been many successful UK radio campaigns, where smart creative and outstanding production values have delivered incredibly satisfying results for clients. Sadly, that just doesn't seem to be the case at the moment.

So what is the solution? It takes a group of skilled craftspeople to create good radio. You need excellent writers, experienced sound designers, well-cast talent and focussed direction to pull it all together. This inevitably means allocating (and safeguarding) sufficient budget to write and deliver a client's messages in the most effective way.

Whereas the digital age has had a positive effect on choice and content, overall it's been negative for the radio advertising industry. Clients have too much choice and too many mediums, which has impacted the budget and use of the medium. With advertising budgets stretched across all of these mediums, brand managers are under more pressure than ever to deliver value in everything they do.

It is a shame that the creative and production of radio commercials seem to have been affected by this. There are a lot of opportunities to deliver very targeted or bespoke messages, to the right audience, in today's radio landscape. Maybe the key is spending budget on smaller, more targeted audiences, rather than stretching budgets to make more generic commercials to a larger group of listeners.

Another way to potentially bring about a new golden age in radio advertising lies in getting a new generation of creative and brand managers excited by the possibilities of the medium. This is why I am massively pleased to see the new [Air Your Briefs](#) competition, from none other than The Drum [in partnership with RAB], part of a wider ambition to promote the power of radio as an advertising medium.



MODERN MARKETING

I don't pretend to have all of the answers, but I do know that radio is as strong as it has ever been. The good news is that the digital age has enhanced it, rather than killed it. There is a real hunger for good content, and if brands want an audience, they have it. They just need to look at a better way of communicating their messages to them.

Nicola Gilbert is deputy managing director at Grand Central Recording Studios