

Achieving A Perfect 10

ARBITRON RATINGS are mysterious to all but those who live or die by them, namely local radio stations and their staffs. Indeed, Arbitron books are comparable in readability to IRS tax tables, and their contents often hold a similar financial significance. Higher ratings command higher advertising rates and relieve some of the competitive pressure, at least until the next ratings period.

Clearly one of the biggest stories in the spring Arbitron ratings is the quantum leap taken by WLOL-FM from a 4.4 share (percentage of total audience listening to the radio) to a 10.0 share. Such a dramatic increase in market share is unprecedented in recent rating history, and catapults the station to third in overall market standings. Perennial front runners WCCO-AM and KS95-FM each experienced sizable drops, from 22.9 to 20.0 and 14.8 to 12.2, respectively. The most action is occurring within the 18-34 age group, the one most coveted by advertisers. Any sizable switch in ratings with this age group can represent economic boon or boondoggle to those affected stations.

Hard-rock battlers KDWB and KQRS continue to slug it out for the younger half of that 18-34 market, with KD emerging from this latest round with a sizable lead — an 8.0 share to KQ's 5.1. Country station WDGY-AM had by far the best showing of any station on the AM side of the dial, leaving them in fourth place overall.

Doyle Rose, general manager of WLOL-FM, has good reason to celebrate. He orchestrated both the format change and the \$200,000 promotional effort key to their successful ratings. Late last year, Rose identified an opportunity for a station that could deliver a sound somewhere between the hard and soft rock formats existing in the market. What evolved was an innovative (for the Twin Cities, at least) format that has attracted new listeners from both ends of the rock spectrum.

Together with Detroit-based programming consultant Paul Christy, Rose developed the station's current sound of "up-tempo adult contemporary" music, which ranges from Melissa Manchester to Billy Idol to Foreigner. At the same time, WLOL began running 10 songs in a row throughout the day, without commercial interruption, except in their early-morning show.

Once the desired sound was determined, Rose next had to find the right on-air talent to make it work. Enter John Hines and Bob Berglund. Their job was to gain a loyal following in the important morning-drive time slot, syphoning off listeners from KS95's Chuck Knapp and Michael J. Douglas. WLOL even offered a \$500 cash award in a contest directed at KS95 listeners to get them to try Hines & Berglund and send in their reasons for preferring WLOL's pair.

Apparently they've succeeded in attracting an audience. They tripled their share of 18- to 34-year-olds, placing them squarely among the ratings leaders. Amazingly, their female listeners in that age group jumped from a 3.7 share last fall to a hefty 17.8, while their share of men ages 18-34 went from 5.3 to 13.1. Hines and Berglund haven't exactly deposed KS95's Knapp and Douglas as kings of the FM morning drive, still trailing in 18-34 men and women by 6 and 13 points respectively.

Rose attributes WLOL's success to their "fresh format, having a unique position in the marketplace," and estimates that their current

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market share could represent "between \$2 and \$3 million in increased advertising revenue over the next 12 months." Not too shabby.

Rose admits that their new ratings were a pleasant surprise but not totally unexpected, since the Birch Report, another radio rating service, has been showing strong gains for WLOL since early spring.

So once again the semi-annual Arbitron ratings bring good cheer to some and panic to others. Much like Minnesota's weather, the only thing you can be sure of is that the ratings are bound to change once again. □

—Joe Voyles