Quality

Tips and guidelines for producing a quality radio show on Radio Fairfax & WRLD

Version 1.2

RADIO PRODUCTION QUALITY GUIDE

Introduction and Summary

The purpose of this guide is to provide radio producers with a basic framework for producing and airing a radio show that meets the general quality objectives suggested by station staff and endorsed by the general membership of the Radio Guild. As freeform public access stations, Radio Fairfax and WRLD offer a forum for creativity. Although content is up to each producer, **quality** is something that should be common to all programs.

> **Quality Definition:** *a broadcast with a consistent flow and structure that provides for proper station IDs, promotions and PSA (public service announcement) breaks and smooth transitions between shows.*

The basic guidelines one should follow for a quality show are provided, in part, during the Radio Production Class. This guide will provide standards and practices that will not only enhance the quality of individual shows, but also improve the quality of Radio Fairfax and WRLD as a whole. Providing a quality listening experience leads to a repeat audience and more opportunities for the station and the producer.

General Standards and Practices

The following are the key elements of quality that are examined during the Radio Production Class. They are provided here to reinforce the building blocks necessary for a quality show. A more detailed discussion of these elements is provided in the Radio Production Class manual.

Planning – The most important element of quality is planning. Initially, this is the process by which producers plan their show after they have decided which type of show they want to produce. Once a show format has been decided, it becomes the weekly process of planning the show for the following week. Obviously, the level of detail and the nature of this planning is up to each individual producer, but a good rule of thumb is the **Two for One Rule**:

> *Two hours of planning of every one hour of broadcasting*

Show Structure and Flow – Shows should have a regular structure so that listeners come to anticipate the pace and flow to the broadcast. Some ways to accomplish this are the following:

- Opening and closing theme songs
- Regular segments
- Station breaks at the top and bottom of the hour

Consistency - The themes of your show should be constant so that listeners know what to expect. Some call it the "McDonald's Quality Factor". No matter where you go in the world, McDonald's restaurants are consistent. Each one is different, but there are enough common elements to let you know what to expect. A quality broadcast should have the same consistency. Each show is different, but there are enough common themes that the listener knows what to expect.

Another aspect of consistency is a fixed timeslot. Once you find a timeslot that is suitable to your needs, it is beneficial to retain that timeslot or publicize your new timeslot so your audience isn't con-fused about how to find you. Making sure your show airs each week lets the audience know that your show is reliable and if they take the time to turn to our channel, your show will be there. If a new listener stops by the channel, checks the schedule and your show is not airing when it should be, it is unlikely they will check back again.

Studio Standards

Pre-show Activities

The Radio Production Course manual provides a complete checklist of pre-show activities. Although all steps should be followed, this guide will restate those activities that have a direct impact on a show's quality.

- Arrive at studio at least 15 minutes prior to your show
- Discuss with the on-air producer how they will end the show with respect to the transition and set up Wavecart

- Check the source input displays and configure board to your show
- Setup any guests with headphones and microphones and check levels using the cue function or selecting only B from the top of the source fader (anything on A goes to air)
- Setup any air copy or reference materials
- Start Wavecart stack and start your show on time

On-Air Standard

Every show on Radio Fairfax and WRLD is different, but every show should have three things in common: a beginning, middle and end.

The <u>show introduction</u> (the beginning) is important because it sets the stage for the show's content. It should be consistent (this is usually done through theme music) and should give the listener some indication of what they will hear over the next hour or two. If theme music is used, it shouldn't run more than 45 seconds without a voice-over.

The <u>show</u> (the middle) is the main course and should be served in well-measured portions. This means allowing time for breaks. Breaks have several purposes including giving yourself a rest (especially if you have a talk format), rebrand the station through Station ID's, promoting other programming, and providing an opportunity to transition between themes. Whatever the reason, these breaks should support the flow of the show, not disrupt it. Therefore, breaks, like the actual content of the show, should be planned in advanced.

The <u>transition</u> (the end) is the wrap up and needs to be smooth in order to provide for continuity between shows. Each transition should be around 2-5 minutes while the next producer sets up their show. It should also include a mention about what show will follow, and if you've planned for future shows. Theme music for the exit is not necessary, but it does help bracket the show's content and provides a clean ending to the proceedings. If you are transitioning to or from automation, watch the automation monitor to pick up songs at their beginning and end, if possible.

Listening Quality

Another important aspect of quality is what a listener hears or doesn't hear from the television, computer, or mobile device. Levels and dead air also impact the quality of the broadcast.

Levels – check the meters for your audio levels frequently. If levels are set too high listeners may hear distortion, which will detract from the program's content. Keep the green bars between 0 and -6db. Even if it sounds OK to you in the studio, levels consistently in the red become distorted and overmodulated.

Dead Air – try to make transitions as smooth as possible between songs, breaks and stop sets during the show and between programs. Periods of dead air disrupt the rhythm of the show and leaves a listener wondering if there is a problem with the broadcast.

On-Air Mistakes - Do not draw attention to your mistakes with announcements like "Whoops…don't know what happened there," or "Wow…I can't figure out how to work this thing," or "Nothing in this studio ever works…that's how you know we're public access." Even if you try to play it off, it's not funny to your audience. It's not entertaining to listen to someone try to figure out how to work equipment. Cover mistakes quickly with no acknowledgement (unless you give out wrong information). Use Wavecart to cover if necessary. Think quickly and give out artist or track information, start a new conversation with the audience using "coming up in this hour" dialog.

Energy/Personality – Your show energy should be right in line with your intended audience. Your pacing, enthusiasm and humor can quickly engage or disengage a listener in a matter of seconds. If you are tired, cranky or bored, that will reflect in your presentation. If you are bored with your own show, imagine how your audience feels!

Vocal Performance – Not everyone is born with a voice like James Earl Jones. But you don't need an incredible speaking voice to perform on the air. You do need to be aware of your diction, vocal tone and pitch. Remember,

you're not talking to yourself! Avoid the following speech killers: mumbling, speaking too fast, chopping off the endings of words, forgetting to breathe while speaking, speaking too softly or speaking in a monotone.

On-Air Conversation – Having a co-host or in-studio guests can add a lot to your show. It can also be a recipe for confusion. Since the radio audience relies on audio-only cues, they need to be able to follow your train of thought and feel as though they are *listening in on* or *being invited to join* a compelling conversation. Make sure that each guest's microphone is customized and set to its proper level. Avoid having people talking over one another. As a host, it is your job to retain control of the conversation – kill mics if necessary. Re-introduce the host & guests periodically throughout the show.

Post-Show Practices

Quality, and the lack thereof is contagious, and one way of passing on a lack of quality is by not providing the following producer with what he or she requires to perform a good show. Here are four main activities you can perform to help fellow producers put on a good show.

Reset the board – By pressing the button marked "1" on the board, all sources should reset to default. Every producer should expect this configuration to be in place when they take their seat at the board.

Reset the CD players to single cut mode and auto queue - Just like the board configuration, this is a standard setting that producers should expect to see when they get ready to take over the controls.

Prep the next producer of any malfunctioning equipment – If a piece of studio equipment is malfunctioning or not working during the show, then put in a red card and just as importantly, tell the next producer. That way, they can avoid using that piece of equipment, and thus avoid potential on-air mishaps.

Be courteous – It sounds simple, but mutual respect in the

studio is sometimes forgotten. Right before a show, people are excited and ready to roll. Tempers can flare if there are intrusions or unintentional disrespect. While you arrive 15 minutes before your show, be careful not to distract the producer from the last portion of their show. Do not bring guests into the studio until the transition is beginning.

Pre-Recording (Shows, Evergreens and Promos)

Weekly pre-recorded shows: Producers always have the option of pre-recording their show for broadcasting at a later date, and all the information provided above still applies. In fact, pre-recording has the added advantage of being able to improve the quality of the broadcast before it is aired. Producers who do pre-record their weekly show should always make sure that their files get sent to the Programming department in a timely fashion.

Evergreens: Every producer must have an evergreen show available for broadcast in case he or she is unavailable to produce a live show. Ideally, the evergreen show should be a new show that is not time sensitive (i.e., making references to specific dates and/ or events), and each evergreen should only be used once. Re-broadcasting previous shows is acceptable but not recommended. Whenever possible, the producer should inform listeners when an evergreen or re-broadcast is being aired. Also, the evergreen should include the disclaimer that the broadcast is pre-recorded so that listeners will know not to call in. This disclaimer should be repeated throughout the evergreen as well.

Promos: The quality of each show extends beyond the weekly broadcast. Show promos should make up part of each producer's show. Therefore, having current promos on Wavecart of each show is important. Ideally, each promo should be no more than 30 seconds and include the show title, a brief description, the times and day of the broadcast and the station's name.

Tips on Quality

The following is a list of helpful suggestion and ideas from the station staff as tips for improving the quality of your show.

Notes – put together a script or set of notes to the show's music or topics to improve the flow of the show.

Timetable – develop a timetable for each show that list the length of each segment and breaks so that the show can stay on schedule.

Taping Shows – tape your show and listen to it in order to find areas in which you can improve the broadcast.

Playing Show Promos – if available and if possible, play the promo for the broadcast following your own. Also, try to play promos in the same genre as your own show. This helps lend to the overall continuity of not only your show but also the station's format.