

Producing a Radio Programme

Ivan Said

“A radio programme on a nationwide radio gives your class or school the golden opportunity to broadcast your message all over the two islands”

With thirteen nationwide radios and six long-term community radios on the island your class may come across the opportunity to produce a radio programme.

Or else, your school may want to emulate Mosta Girls' Secondary School, "Lily of the Valley", who set up a community radio called "Radio Lilium". The station, run by the students, transmits daily during the week, throughout the school breaks and early in the morning. It was inaugurated on March 27, 2000, by the President of Malta Professor Guido de Marco.

Such a radio can have a temporary (one month) or a long-term (one-year, renewable) licence. Such stations are set up to keep in touch with the community surrounding the school, raise funds for a particular school project or just to express its voice. In each case, school democracy is deeply strengthened.

"Radio is the media genie, small enough to fit in a bottle, big enough to cover continents," write Michael Kaye and Andrew Popperwell of the BBC World Service in their book, "Making Radio – A Guide to Basic Radio Techniques", published by Broadside Books Ltd., London (1992).

A radio programme on a nationwide radio gives your class or school the golden opportunity to broadcast your message all over the two islands. According to the October 22-28 October 1999 Broadcasting Authority survey 74.6 per cent of the Maltese listen to the radio regularly.

On the other hand a community radio (one-off or long-term) covers only an area of 2.5-Km radius.

In case you want to set up a community radio one has to apply for a licence from the Malta Broadcasting Authority. A licence for a one-off (one-month) community radio licence costs Lm 50 application plus Lm 50 licence, Lm 100 in all. A licence for a long-term (one year, renewable) community radio costs Lm 50 application plus Lm 150 licence, Lm 200 in all. Besides this expense one would need to consider other expenses such as the hiring or purchasing of transmission and production equipment. Your Pentium PC may easily serve as your production equipment.

In all cases there are legal and ethical obligations the class team has to observe. (For more details consult the Malta Broadcasting Authority web site: <http://www.ba-malta.org/>)

The idea of setting up "Radio Lilium" came from the Head of School, Ms M. D. Aquilina, and with the approval of the staff. As a matter of fact the radio station's programmes are included in the school's Development Plan. Veteran broadcaster Charles Abela Mizzi helped greatly in training the students in running

the station. The station has a Head of Programmes, Head of News, etc. "The station transmits early in the morning at 7.15 a.m. till 8 a.m.," Ms Aquilina told me. "During school breaks there are scheduled programmes varying from news, interviews, story telling, and playing of popular songs."

"Through the radio station, the school is trying to improve communication skills in writing, speaking and the right use of the media. This station besides motivating the students to be creative, is also fostering a healthy and appealing atmosphere in the school," Ms Aquilina added.

I strongly believe that sometimes chances arise for groups to produce a programme, free of charge, on nationwide radios. It did happen in the 1998-1999 scholastic year to a group of male drama students from Vittoriosa Fortini Boys' Secondary "Lorenzo Gafà" who joined forces with another group of female drama students from the Cospicua Girls' Secondary Erin Serracino Inglott, led by Mr. Mario Azzopardi and aided by some of their teachers. The students produced a radio version of their docu-drama, "Retro – Harsa lejn is-Snin Sittin", presented at their schools earlier on and eventually broadcast on *Radju ta' l-Università* during the 1999 Easter week radio schedule. The students had the technical assistance of the radio's staff. Eventually the production was nominated for the Best Educational Programme Award of the Broadcasting Award. Even though it did not win a prize, judges gave it a special mention and the authority's chairman Professor Joe Pirota referred to it in his concluding speech. The advantage of producing a one-off programme (or a series) for an already established radio, nationwide or otherwise, is that you have readily available the much needed technical assistance and the equipment in place as was in the three cases mentioned above.

The school (or class) may either be asked by the station manager or may seek itself the opportunity. In any case the group has to face the manager and show convincingly that they mean business. Thus good preparatory work should be done. Moreover, whether it is an audience of twelve people or one million, listeners deserve the best.

Here I am presenting a series of steps to help you arrive at writing a well thought out proposal to be presented to the station manager and tips to help you produce a good – and the right – radio programme.

The Objective of the programme

- To inform only?
- To educate only?
- To entertain only?



IVAN SAID is with the ETC. He has a BA (Communications Studies and Maltese) and an MA Qualifying. He was features editor of *The Times* and a programming officer for *Radju ta' l-Università*. He trained in journalism in Berlin and Malta. He underwent a Med-Media educational radio course in November 1992.

Nationwide Radios	
NAME	FREQUENCY
Radju Malta 1	999 kHz MW 93.7 MHz FM
FM Bronja	91.7 MHz FM
Super 1	92.7 MHz FM
Radio 101	101 MHz FM
RTK	103 MHz FM
Radio Calypso	102.3 MHz FM
Radju ta' l-Universita'	103.7 MHz FM
Bay Radio	89.7 MHz FM
Island Sound	101.8 MHz FM
Capital Radio	88.7 MHz FM
Radju MAS	103.7 MHz FM
Smash Radio	104.6 MHz FM
Radju Parlament	106.2 MHz FM

Long Term Community Radios (As on December 31, 1999)		
NAME	FREQUENCY	BASED
Radju Xeberras	90.8 MHz FM	Valletta
Radju Cottoner	98 MHz FM	Cospicua
Lehen il-Qala	106.5 MHz FM	Qala, Gozo
Deejays Radio	95.6 MHz FM	Kappara
Eden Radio	107.6 MHz FM	Zejtun
Radju Marija	106 MHz FM	Rabat

One-Off Community Radios (As on December 31, 1999)	
NAME	BASED
Radju tal-Katidral	Victoria, Gozo
Radju tal-Belt Victoria	Victoria, Gozo
Radju tal-Providenza	Siggiewi
Radju Bambina	Senglea
Radju Prekursur	Xewkija, Gozo

The author (third from left) and audio technical officer Kenneth Mizzi (centre) with the participant students of "Retro - Harsa lejn is-Snin Sittin" in one of the studios of Radju ta' l-Universita'



To inform or to educate while you entertain?

Know your Target Audience

- Who are the members of your audience?
- Age;
- Education;
- Interests;
- Well Being;
- Socioeconomic status.

Live broadcast or recorded? In studio or outside?

- Is it a live broadcast or recorded?
- Recorded in studio or outside?
- Is it an outside live broadcast or a studio bound transmission?
- Whichever is your choice, do you need pre-recorded items or postproduction?
- For the purpose of this programme, what advantages does your choice have on other alternative modes of radio broadcasting?
- Is it feasible? Will it achieve your programme aims at higher or lower costs than other modes of radio broadcasting?
- Have you considered all costs?
- In Malta, guests are not paid for their contribution. Will you be sticking to this unwritten convention?

Outside live broadcast:

- More real, riskier;
- More expensive;
- Needs more planning;
- Involves a larger variety of techniques

Thus it is pertinent to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have all necessary permits?
- Is the line of transmission clear?
- Is the noise interference present manageable?
- What advantages does this option have on the option of a live studio broadcast?
- Do you have enough personnel to help you?
- What equipment do you need on site?
- Do you need pre-recorded items?

Outside recorded programme:

- Less costly than live;
- Allows for editing and postproduction;
- Any noise can be controlled if not eliminated;
- Any unforeseen mishap during recording can be edited out during or after recording;

Still there are questions that you need to ask:

- Do you have all necessary permits?
- Is the noise interference on site manageable?
- What advantages does this option have on the option of a studio recording?
- Do you have enough personnel to help you?
- What equipment do I need on site?
- Do I need pre-recorded items?

Recorded in studio

- The situation in a studio is far more manageable, less expensive than other options and more controllable.

Still there are questions, which you need to ask:

- Have you booked your studio?
- What advantages does this option have on other options we discussed above?
- Do your guests know their way to the studio?
- Have you agreed clearly on the studio appointment?
- Make sure that your studio is not in a mess or in a way that it gives an unwelcome sight to your guests.
- Will you be offering a cup of tea or a glass of water, especially if your guests are not being paid for their contribution?
- Do you need pre-recorded items?

Live studio broadcast

- Most of what has been written above under "Recorded in studio" item applies except that:
- It is far more exciting;
- If in the case of a recorded session one can be soft on punctuality in this case punctuality is essential, never excusable as the appointment is not just with your studio guests and personnel, but concurrently with your listeners.
- This is a live transmission: all gaffes take place in real time – they cannot be edited out – and thus they are heard, listened to, followed, discussed, accepted or refused, laughed at or scorned by your listeners to whom you owe brand loyalty.
- If your production will include phone calls you are legally bound to see that the 10-second delay system is perfectly working, otherwise exclude phone-ins.
- Always treat any microphone you see or touch as on.

This schema can easily be used in a media education class on radio broadcasting. Imagine if such a class is complemented by a real radio production experience.

For further reading may I suggest the book "Modern Radio Production" (3rd edition), by Lewis B. O'Donnell, Philip Benoit and Carl Hausman, which you can find at the University of Malta library.