

On the radio: Stations need to rechannel their energy

BY DAVID HINCKLEY

Monday, November 3rd 2008, 4:00 AM

Much of commercial radio is working hard to keep up with the rapidly shifting technology curve, adding HD channels and streaming a growing amount of diverse content on the Internet.

WLTW (106.7), for instance, is already streaming Christmas music. WWFS (102.7 FM) has a stream with the rock format of its predecessor, WNEW-FM.

But in the bigger picture, says [Erik Schwartz](#), radio is moving too slowly and too often in the wrong direction.

Specifically, he says, "Radio has to stop thinking it is in the broadcasting business and realize it's the content business."

That's not a small distinction. He means that despite the fact companies often paid hundreds of millions of dollars for transmitters, those transmitters "are getting less valuable by the day."

Because every day, more of the audience gets radio info some way - the Internet, cell phones, whatever - that doesn't require a broadcast signal.

But, he adds, that's also the good news. "People still want audio content, which means there will always be an audience for a good radio station," he says. "That may mean more talk and sports because those are unique to your station. If you play music, you can't just play songs. An [iPod](#) does that. You need personality."

Which is exactly what commercial and satellite radio are moving away from.

Schwartz is not a neutral observer here, by the way. He created a service called Foneshow that transmits content to cell phones on demand. For a subscription fee, the phone's owner can have 2-4/7 access to services like [CNN Marketplace](#), weather, [NPR](#) stories and [Air America](#) shows like [Rachel Maddow](#).

"People want information when they want it," he says. "In many situations today, a news update from two hours ago is worthless. You can't wait until you're back to your radio. You need it on your phone or another portable device." In other words, a radio station's content is still valuable. It just needs to be available on all other platforms as easily as it's now available on the dial.

For business purposes, then, it also needs a way to measure total all-platform listening, so it can charge advertisers accordingly.

"Look at what [Rush Limbaugh](#) has done," says Schwartz. "He's still No. 1 on traditional radio, but he also has his 2-4/7 club, where people pay to hear him streamed whenever they want. He makes millions from that. So it's clear the demand is there."

And so, he says, will a smart radio station - "one that realizes its job is to provide great content."

CHERNOFF PROMOTED: Mark Chernoff has been named vice president of programming for all New York [CBS](#) stations - WCBS-AM, WCBS-FM, WWFS, WINS, WFAN & WXRK.

http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv/2008/11/03/2008-11-03_on_the_radio_stations_need_to_rechannel_-1.html?print=1&page=all