

ABC Radio

Response to Draft Report, Editorial Review No.3

Story and issue choice on selected ABC Radio programs.

General remarks

ABC Radio welcomes the valuable opportunity for informed scrutiny of a selection of morning programs by a respected elder of the Australian radio industry. In particular, the individual program teams have been appreciative of the invitation to step back from the pressures of daily production and reflect on their editorial practices through the combined prism of professional review and relevant external data on audience interests. It has also been valuable and interesting for them to compare their story choices with those of similar programs in other markets.

Radio is pleased to note in Mr Mott's overview that

- All programs performed strongly in achieving a varied mix of content
- They also did well in providing impartial and balanced coverage of contentious issues
- They were 'on target' with regard to the IPSOS Mind and Mood results
- They appeared to be 'in sync' with the needs of their listeners.

Radio has distributed the draft report to the selected program teams and relevant managers. While noting the positive assessment overall, they were asked to consider these two specific observations:

- That the regional programs contained a higher proportion of strictly 'local' content than their metropolitan counterparts¹
- That listener feedback was more prominent on the metro stations, particularly through the use of talkback and on-air reading of texts and tweets.

They were also asked to read the full report carefully, to consider the accompanying pie charts showing the distribution of content by program, and to augment their regular cycle of program reviews and airchecks through team discussion around the specific observations.

Individual program responses

774 ABC Melbourne (the Morning Show with Jon Faine)

Graham Mott noted in his review that the program gets through a variety of topics each day with an emphasis on city and state politics. He also commended the consistent use of audience participation throughout the morning. The program team have been focussing on this element of the program and were pleased to see that it is bearing fruit. It was also noticeable from the rundowns that they make a special point of following up on stories over time. They noted that the skew towards political

¹ In general, the teams felt that the reviewer had understood the issues behind the different content mix and didn't feel they needed to add anything.

topics is explained by the particular circumstances of a state government without a clear majority, a series of political 'scandals' and a looming election.

The program team were struck by the low incidence of content around crime, although this is a prominent community concern. While there would be little value trying to replicate the role of ABC News in reporting on individual crime stories, they are now developing approaches which would allow discussion of crime at a deeper level, and are actively seeking good talent in this area.

891 ABC Adelaide (the Morning Show with Ian Henschke)

This program team were very interested in the Mind and Mood data, which both consolidated and extended their own perceptions of matters of community interest. They did feel that the question of local relevance arose sometimes with the material – for example, it is their view, based on extensive audience interaction, that crime is not as prominent an issue in Adelaide that it may be in other cities. Overall, the team will use this report and associated information to inform and refine content choices.

612 ABC Brisbane (the Morning Show with Steve Austin)

Among other matters, the reviewer noted the mix of light and shade that the program team believe to be essential in the Brisbane market. He also observed the high level of use of audience feedback, and the extent to which it now drives content selection. The team report that they now make extensive use of audience talkback, email and social media to source stories of interest to the community. They monitor local twitter streams closely to pick up on trending topics and many follow up stories are inspired and guided by audience response. 612 will build on these observations to further develop this intense community engagement.

630 ABC North Queensland (Townsville) presented by Paula Tapiolas

During the time available for responding, the Townsville office was struck by illness, and they were not able to spend as much time on the report as they would have liked. They will be able to return to it at a later stage. However, they did note that their capacity to take a strictly local focus was restricted because the program is quite often syndicated into other regions, and that they have no field reporter and the small size of the team made it difficult to integrate social media into their programming as much as they would like. However, they were interested in the reviewer's remarks around fostering greater audience engagement and will consider appropriate strategies.

NSW (ABC 702 Sydney Mornings with Linda Mottram and 9.59 Dubbo morning show)

The Local Content Manager for NSW sent a response encompassing both the metro and regional program under consideration. He was pleased that the review revealed such a broad mix of content

on both shows. He was surprised to see so few stories on the economy (especially around household and personal finance) showing up for 702 and has suggested that this is a sampling anomaly, as the program does cover such stories regularly. On the issue of regional audience engagement, he advised that this is an ongoing area of interest to radio management. After many years of feedback, he has come to the view that this is partly because

- People living in small communities are fearful of being identified (the state-wide programs tend to get a higher caller rate as there is less chance of being known to other listeners)
- Many calls to the metro stations now are made from mobile phones, especially from cars during peak commuting times. Connectivity in the bush is still a considerable problem, and there are different rhythms to the day.

720 ABC Perth (Mornings with Geoff Hutchinson)

The Morning Show team advised that they were happy with the mix of content revealed by the audit. While there did seem to be a disproportionate amount of content devoted to crime (at around 34%), they advised that this was during a week with a major crime story dominating the news in Perth (the release from custody of a notorious serial sex offender), with many strands that kept it in the headlines – and hence a focus for the Morning Show. In later weeks, there has been significantly less time devoted to that content area. The 720 Morning team also thought it interesting that the Ipsos Top 10 didn't have sport as one of the categories, as feedback from audiences consistently suggest that it should be a vital part of the content mix.

684 ABC Southwest (Bunbury) presented by Naomi Christensen

Although a broad range of subjects of local relevance were included in their program, the team acknowledged that they had probably not done enough on the four 'Mind and Mood' issues of economy, health, crime and cost of living in recent times. They will now work towards sourcing content which more closely reflects those areas of major interest on a more consistent basis. They are proposing to run a 'stakeholder's exercise' to broaden their sources of talent and enrich the content mix. They also commented on the particular challenges of talkback and other forms of audience participation in small communities, and this will be addressed by all WA regional stations in the coming months.

Life Matters with Natasha Mitchell (Radio National)

The Editor of Daily Programs at Radio National was pleased to see that this helpful analysis of a sample week showed Life Matters was consistently meeting its brief, and covering topics of interest to listeners -- in particular education, economy, employment, cost of living, economics, health and aspects of crime. Over 5 hours a week, most of these topics are touched on in some way. The Life Matters approach is to look at how these issues affect 'you' or 'me' and to engage listeners through SMS, social media, online comments and talkback. As Life Matters is a broad social issues program 58% of airtime devoted to social issues indicates the program is fulfilling its brief. The Editor advised

that the percentages shown for education and health in this sample were anomalous, as these topics are under very regular consideration, including on other days in the weeks under review. She also reported that 'international' skewed much higher than would be normal because of personal stories revealing new angles on the Malaysia Airlines disaster and life in Kabul, and provided information around typical economic coverage (very much focussed around the cost of living) and the composition of the 'other' category on the graph, which would skew heavily to lifestyle content such as food and cooking.

The Life Matters team felt that the information provided was extremely helpful in assisting with story choice, and careful study of the graphs indicated that Life Matters is suitably complementary to the Local Radio offer in each market, by providing a focused social issues program with greater depth achieved through longer segments and a diversity of guests.