

## **SOME NOTES ON RADIO PRODUCTION. WHICH YOU MAY CHOOSE TO IGNORE!!**

Most of what I have to suggest is pure common sense - and will probably sound like stating the obvious. However, sometimes it helps just to stop and think, and then get those thoughts in to some kind of logical order.

So - let's assume that you have decided that you would like to make a programme for CSFM. Straight away you have decisions to make.

- 1) What sort of programme?:** (short, long, a series, live or recorded, part of someone else's show i.e. in a magazine programme, suitable for the morning, afternoon, evening or overnight, contentious, aggressive, investigative the list goes on...
- 2) What will it be about?** Do you have an organization to publicise, an issue you want to raise, is it just entertainment, do you want to introduce a new idea to people, are there people we should hear from, or maybe you just want to share your hobby with the village .... again the list goes on...
- 3) How will you make it?** If you are pre-recording you need to ask where, how and who --- and possibly why! It has great advantages - you will get exactly the kind of programme you want - you are totally in control - the 'on air' sound will most probably be far better, it can be more complicated and thoughtful, and you don't have to commit to being in the studio at any particular time. On the downside it is very labour intensive, takes hours of work and could get 'lost' once it gets into the system!! Live programmes can be great when you invite your guests to come for a studio discussion. They can be far more spontaneous and exciting. On the downside they can be deadly dull if you get the mix wrong, guests may not turn up, may have nothing to say, or may get stage fright and clam up. It is far less controllable - but sometimes a lot more fun. Oh decisions decisions.....
- 4) Who will help you make it?** A key question. It's always better to have two brains than one working on a programme - you can bounce ideas around and comfort each other when things go wrong, and go and have a drink when things go right (or is it the other way round ... ) - but I wouldn't try and do it by committee .... too many people involved and you'll never get a decision.....Decide if you are happy to handle the technical side of the recording and editing. If you are not - find someone to help. (the preferred method is mini-disc, contact Richard Wheeler <mailto:richard@thewordshop.co.uk>
- 5) Are you a performer or a back stage worker?** Another decision to make - do you want to be the monkey or the organ grinder - or both! All things are possible - it's up to you to put your ideas into practice. There will be very little extra man /woman power around to help - so you may well have to 'do it yourself.

## **IF YOU DECIDE TO MAKE PRE-RECORDED PROGRAMMES:**

- 1) Before you do anything else make a cup of tea, or pour yourself a nice glass of wine and sit down with a big, empty piece of paper and a pencil.
- 2) Write down your basic idea
- 3) Work out what you want to say or to find out.
- 4) Think what topics or areas you would like to cover.
- 5) Come up with a wish list of interviewees.
- 6) If you are to have a presenter then decide who you would like to ask. You do not always have to have one- sometimes your material will make sense without this linking.
- 7) Remember you are making a radio programme - you will need to paint your picture with sounds - so think what 'actuality' you will need - e.g. if you have an outdoor theme - then you may need bird song or traffic noise, about children perhaps you will need playground noise, if it's sport the sound of bat on ball etc etc etc. so write possible sound effects down on your list.
- 8) Will you use music-it can be really helpful to set a tone or a mood - but that means you have to find the music and mix it in . Write your thoughts down.

## **ONCE YOU HAVE MADE THOSE DECISIONS:**

- 1) Think about the structure of your programme:. Work out what needs to go at the very start to establish the mood and the idea. How are you going to introduce your theme so the listener immediately understands what it is they are going to hear.
- 2) Work out how you can then take this idea or theme forward to keep the listener engaged, how your interviewees will fit in, what other sounds you need, etc etc
- 3) Think how you are going to end - are you going to draw conclusions, leave them wanting more ... etc etc -do you have title music or not .....

## **YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN:**

- 1) Do your research - check out your ideas and make sure you are right! Check that your potential interviewees are the right people - phone them up and chat over your ideas - see how they feel about participating, and then fix a date and time ..... Do you want them to come to you - or will you go to them .... Work out how much of them You think you will use - are they going to be a 30 second clip or a half hour interview.... Don't over record because you will have a massive editing job. Don't under record - or you'll be frustrated that you haven't got the right bit on tape ..... If you've thought about it first you should be fine.... Decide what the purpose of the interview is - to discuss issues, or establish facts. Make sure you can counter if there is to be an argument - knowing your facts is all part of good planning.
- 2) Familiarise yourself with whatever recording equipment you have chosen to use. How does it work? Where do you plug the microphone in? Do you have to turn the microphone on independently - have you got enough batteries, have you got enough discs / space - do you need to take a mains plug - will there be electricity where you are going - again it's all a case of common sense and good planning.

- 3) The interview: Unless your interview demands it (e.g. if you are doing a piece outside about traffic problems) try to find a quiet, comfortable place to conduct your interview. Make sure your interviewee is comfortable, and as much as possible can forget that you are putting a microphone under their nose. (Unless, that is, you doing an aggressive 'door stepping' kind of programme and want to catch them off guard!!!) Have a quick check around the room - see if there is a clock that will strike, a phone that will ring, a bird that will sing - you can guarantee if it can happen it will! You are unlikely to find the perfect room - but you can minimize the risk of a bad recording by being aware of some of the pitfalls. If you are in an empty room with lots of windows the sound will bounce around and sound very 'thin' - you can still record here - but make sure you are both very close to the microphone. If you can, choose a room with curtains and furniture - anything to absorb the sound that bounces about ...this gives you a much better quality of recording. When you hold the microphone make sure it feels comfortable, and don't move it around too much. Make sure you point it in the right direction (towards the mouth!) and that you are close enough to get a good result. Ideally you should listen on a pair of headphones, even if only when you are setting up the machine. Do a quick test first before you start. Perhaps ask your interviewee their name and title - then listen back and see if it sounds right. There's nothing worse than doing a whole interview only to find out that either it hasn't recorded or that it sounds poor.
- 4) Always remember that you are interviewing people to get THEIR opinions and thoughts. You will have plenty of space to say what you think later - so let them talk. Keep your questions relevant and concise - and don't answer them yourself.
- 5) I am sure you will know the list of 'who, why, what, where and when' beloved of news reporters ... but also think about 'open' questions that allow your interviewee space : 'How do you feel about....' being the classic. Try not to ask questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' - you'll feel deflated and probably panic about where to go next with the interview and give up ..... It's a good idea to jot down a list of questions before you start - but only use it as an aide memoir if you get into a sticky situation. You are much better off LISTENING to what your interviewee is telling you, rather than sticking to a written list. However, it can be useful if you get a lot of 'yes' 'no's -
- 6) Think about the kind of person you are talking to..... if it's a council official who is used to being put on the spot you will have a different approach from say collecting a family history from a 95 year old .... again it's common sense and each situation needs a different approach. If you are sensitive to the 'needs' of your interviewee you will get a much better result.

### **ONCE YOU HAVE COLLECTED ALL YOUR MATERIAL TOGETHER:**

- 1) Listen through and take notes, working out what works and what doesn't.
- 2) Make an edit list - which bits you want and which you don't.
- 3) Work out with the technical team how you then proceed to edit and mix your programme...
- 4) Think of your programme as a jigsaw puzzle-once you have got the pieces together you can start to put them in the right place. You should write a running order. Here is a sample:

**SAMPLE RUNNING ORDER FOR A SIMPLE PRE RECORDED PROGRAMME**  
**due to last 15 minutes:**

	DURATION	INSTRUCTION	TOTAL TIME
Opening music:	1.00	(fade under presenter at 0.45)	0.45
Presenter:	1.10		1.55
1st Interview	4.30		6.25
Presenter	0.45	7.10	
Actuality	0.20	Fade under at 0. 1 5	7.25
2nd interview	5.00		12.25
Presenter	1.00	Fade up music at 0.45	13.25
Closing music	1.30	(can be faded out as needed)	14.40

You can see that this 15 minute programme last for 14 minute.40 seconds. This allows the announcer 20 seconds to introduce it - and still only take up your 15 minute slot.

Once you have recorded it and edited out any mistakes and got it ready for transmission you have two more jobs to do. One is to write down the details of your programme and what you want the linking person (continuity announcer) to say to introduce it. You must also write down the transmission details if you know them - and the length of programme, the first words (or music) and the last words (or music) and anything you want to be said at the end. Here is a sample, which would work for the edited programme we have just looked at:

**PROGRAMME TITLE**

Transmission: (TX) Thursday 21 April 2006 18.00  
Repeat: Friday 22 April 2006 11.30

Announcer:

*Now for today's edition of 'Our Programme'- introduced by John Smith.*

In : 'Music .....

Out: ..... music.

Duration: 14. 40

Back announcement:

*The telephone number mentioned in that programme was 01628 484288 and you can hear it again on Friday at 11.30 in the morning.*

The final job you must now do is to create a 'trail' for your programme - work out how you want to advertise it - and how you can encourage people to listen - after all there's no point in making it if you can't get anyone to listen to it. The trail can take a simple form - a few lines written down to be read out live on air - or it can be a minute or two of tightly edited highlights - it's up to you .....