

Formatting

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Preface

Our job is to play the same songs over and over. For some stations, it is a few hundred songs, for others it's a few thousand. That's what listeners want from a music radio station. In a sentence: *I like a station that plays all my favorite songs with a few surprises mixed in.* Their favorite songs are the familiar songs. The ones they hum along with. The ones they tap their toes to.

Teenage listeners are the most active listeners to music radio and to the music streaming services. They are, and always have been voracious consumers of new songs. They haven't lived long enough to have very many familiar favorite songs that were first released and getting airplay five to seven years before the present time. They weren't listening to much radio or music when they were 10. Heavy listening always starts with puberty. All the music they hear is 'new' to teen ears and the new music they like the most is made by kids who look and sound like them and who write songs and make music that strokes, soothes and supports their youthful and erratic emotions.

When teens latch onto a new 'favorite song', hearing it three to five times a day is not "too much". But, after a teen has heard a song often enough to have had 'enough' of it, they eagerly move on to their next new favorite song. They still want to hear that favorite song, just not so much. It becomes an "oldie" in their personal memory bank. It will still give them pleasure to hear when they are in their 50's. But then, hearing it three or four times a month is "enough".

The best new music is made by young and immature people. The human brain continues to 'mature' up to about age 27. When a person ages past thirty years, they become less interested in hearing new music. Partly it is because new music, 'the kids music' doesn't resonate with them. Partly it is because now that they are fully mature, they don't have time for it. The adult world is demanding. They have jobs, spouses, children and bills to pay. Adults still listen to the station that "plays my favorite songs and a few good new ones" but the operative word there before new is: few. And because the adult may have heard that favorite song 700 or a thousand times, hearing it three times a month now is often enough to please and satisfy.

When we play music for people, we are dealing with a powerful cultural and human catalyst. Music strokes our emotions. It makes us feel better. It accentuates the fun of life. It comforts us when we are sad. People never forget the favorite songs they have in their youth. When people suffer from dementia and Alzheimers disease, the very last thing that fades from their memory is the music of their youth. The old man who no longer remembers his own name will recognize and respond to his favorite Beatles songs.

Listeners are creatures of habit and schedule. They tend to turn on the radio at about the same time each day and listen for a consistent period of time. If they hear a song that they don't particularly like while they are driving to work two or three times during the week, they may conclude that yours is a station that 'plays the same songs over and over' and go looking for another one to listen to.

This is the one, ever present riddle for Current music radio programmers. Listeners want to hear their favorite songs over and over for weeks, even months before they tire of them. Listeners don't want to hear songs they 'don't like'. Some of the songs that one group of listeners just love are songs that other groups of listeners don't much care for. The only time a listener will conclude your station 'plays the same songs too much' is when they hear songs they don't like repeated. Listeners almost never feel a station plays the same songs too much if the songs they hear are primarily songs that are their current favorites. Then when they begin to grow tired of a hit song, if the station continues to play it frequently, the same listener may then begin to feel the station is now playing that one too much. The riddle is: how do you play the same songs over and over, which is what listeners like, without playing songs too much? This is the game we play as music radio programmers. It is a game of nuance and gut feel. It is not easy to be a success at. But for those of us who enjoy it, it is much better than having to work for a living.

We play our game by first developing our strategy, how we are going to construct our music library and then present it to the audience. Then, with our library

selected we have to develop tactics and a system with which to present it, to format it. This section contains the instructions for programming the manual music rotation system that was used by some of the top rated American stations in the 1970s, the decade before the first music scheduling software release. This is how it was done by hand with grids, printed song lists and cards. The goal is to maintain controls on the rotations of the songs in your library so that your on air product will be consistent. The music flow will be as you want it to be, well balanced and representative of the totality of your library. If yours is a Pop music station, you have many different musical styles, some rock, some rap, some disco, etc. You generally don't want to have a run of one type of song, followed by three female ballads, for example. Better to have the different kinds of songs you play spread out to present your audience with a 'variety' mix. To do this, you've got to have a system. You can't rely on the announcers to do it correctly anymore than a doctor can rely on the nurses and attendants to perform the operation.

The system you read about here was used by the great major market stations owned by the RKO Radio chain, arguably the best group of Top 40 Rock n' Roll stations ever with ratings winners in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, Boston, Detroit and New York City. This is how the fine program directors at those stations scheduled and controlled their music flow with pen, paper and numbers on the records.

Now that we're in the computer age, virtually all stations use scheduling software and the music scheduling software I created, *MusicONE*, was developed with careful consideration of the fundamentals of the manual rotation system you read about here. Now that *MusicONE* is running in a thousand broadcast and internet stations around the world, it has proven itself to be radio's most efficient and consistent scheduler software.

The manual rotation system was easy to set-up, efficient to use and required maybe two hours of time each week to maintain and update. While we could use it to schedule every song in every hour, I wouldn't recommend that. Instead, I used it to pre-schedule about half of each hour. I would slot-in the Heavy Currents, Recurrents

and Power Gold. Essentially, every second song was pre-scheduled. Then, I'd rely on the announcers to pick the in-between songs, the Medium Currents and Secondary Gold songs. They could then make adjustments with their selections, picking songs that would balance the music flow properly. Naturally, like any coach, I had to be diligent, listen to how they were doing it, the choices they were making and I'd instruct them with corrections as necessary.

I'm working exclusively in the Country music format now, but the rotation structure and formatting techniques I use are easy to apply to all music formats. The basics of planning and controlling music rotations are much the same regardless of the type of music you play. The variables are how frequently you want songs to be played, how many songs are in each of your categories and the content or 'mix' you prepare with your format clocks.

The 'Current' music formats rely on industry trade charts for guidance in selecting and programming their music and since the charts are published weekly, most stations update their playlists each week, adding some new songs, dropping others, moving songs from one rotation group to another to increase or decrease the rotation and exposure of them. I updated my Current hits list weekly or three times each month. I reviewed and updated my Recurrents or Recent Hits lists every six or eight weeks and the Power Oldies twice a year and recommend following a similar schedule. If you are not reviewing and updating the content and category rotations of your library regularly, your station's music mix will soon become stale.

Playlist Structure

Hit music radio stations have traditionally used three main categories of songs. Current, Recurrent and Oldies. Currents are the new songs on the station. What constitutes a Recurrent or an Oldie is a subjective call, but generally Recurrents (short for: Recent Current) are hits from several months to a year or so back in time. Oldies are Hits from a year or more back. These three groupings are subdivided in a lot of ways

Most people divide their Current list into three groups; Heavy, Medium and Light. Light is generally used to introduce new records into play, the idea being to let the new ones become ‘familiar’ before moving them up into more frequent rotation. It’s a valid principle for some programmers, the thinking being that since audience research always shows the listeners prefer ‘familiar’ music more than unfamiliar, the programmer shouldn’t have new songs playing all that much at first. Instead, new songs are added to the library in a Light rotation to “break them in”, so to speak. Myself, I figure people like new music, they are excited by great new music, so it is valuable to add what you consider to be the very best new songs into the playlist with a frequent rotation pattern.

The conundrum is: Listeners only like new music that they ‘like’; they don’t like new music that they don’t like. The ability to consistently tell the difference, to instinctively feel which new songs have the best potential to become mass-appeal favorites *before* you add them to your playlist is a real art. But if you love the type music your station is playing, it is an art that can be learned.

Most typically, a Light rotation is constructed so as to allow each of the songs in the group to play no more than twice in a 24 hour period. I stopped using a Light Current rotation myself long ago figuring that if I’ve picked the right new songs, why limit the amount of exposure they get in the first weeks of play? I am a programmer who wants to cultivate the image of being the ‘station that plays the best new songs first.’ The station that gets that image is NOT the station that plays the *most* new songs. Rather, it is the station that finds the best few new songs, the ones that have the most potential for becoming big hits and then puts them into rotation with a more frequent exposure pattern, allowing four to five plays in each 24 hour period. Now this is clearly open to debate and not all stations need to be, or could be postured the same way. So, think carefully about your competitive situation and decide what you think will work best for each and every one of your rotation groups.

Some programmers get very exotic with their divisions and sub-groups. But you really need only five. Primary (Heavy) Current; Secondary (Medium) Current; Recurrent; Primary Gold; Secondary Gold. These are explained below.

“Recurrents” are recent hits, songs that are half way between Current and Oldie. Generally, the industry calls it “recurrent” as soon as the song drops off the Current playlist and until the song is about a year to eighteen months old. Most Hit records have a “Current” life of 14-18 weeks. Some have exceptional appeal and don’t burn out until well past 18 weeks of play. Once a song begins to fade from listeners’ ‘my favorite new song’ status, they still want to hear it, just not as much. Thus came the Recurrent rotation group; a category in which the songs continue to play once or twice every day. Now some hits wear out quickly. After listeners have heard a certain song a lot for a three month period, they tire of it and don’t desire to hear the song at all until some point in the future when hearing it occasionally is a treat. This is the kind of song you may want to ‘rest’, bypassing the Recurrent group and keeping it out of play for a period of time. Or, after it drops off the Current list you may simply put it into Secondary Gold rotation where it will get only a few plays a month.

There’s a lot of ‘feel’ that goes into all the rotation decisions you have to make each time you update our current list. Once you have your general plan figured out, my best advice is to not be a by-the-numbers bureaucrat about it. If you are well acquainted with the kinds of songs your listening audience favors most, then your intuition is more likely to lead you to the most competitive adjustments than chart and/or ‘research’ numbers can.

THE PRIMARY CURRENT ROTATION (HEAVY)

You can call it Power, if you like, as many people do. These are the most important songs on your playlist, the ones that set the pace and define much of the style and musical personality of your station. Conservative stations wait a long while, watching local and national audience reaction to each song before placing it into this category. The point of this strategy is to have a “stationality” that is always familiar and comfortable. Liberal stations place some brand new records directly into Power rotation. Their strategy is to create the hip image of a “musical leader”. There is more excitement in this kind of programming but also more risky because if the program/music director makes too many wrong choices and pumps up airplay on

records that don't have the 'juice' to become mass-audience hits, the station's ratings will suffer.

Overly conservative stations bore some listeners because the "play the same songs over and over." Overly liberal stations irritate some listeners because the "favorites" aren't heard often enough. As current hit music stations, the place most of us want to be is probably somewhere in the middle.

Determining just which songs will comprise the Primary Current rotation each week is a combination of art and science. The science part is in the study of listener requests, music sales and the national music charts. (See the sections "Qualitative Request Tabulation", "Qualitative Music Sales Research" and "Using The Trades".) The "art" comes from professional judgment, attention to detail and your gut.

Most stations have a Power Current rotation comprised of between nine and fifteen songs. Whatever you decide upon, there is one important rule that must be followed. If you are formatting an **even** number of Power Currents in your format hour clocks, you need to have an **odd** number of songs in Power. If you format an **odd** number of Powers in your hour clocks, there must be an **even** number of songs in the rotation group. If you don't follow this rule, what happens is the songs in the category will tend to get scheduled and played at the same position in the hour too frequently. Like, Power Current #5 will be scheduled at :10 and :40 minutes past the hour the majority of the time, seldom getting scheduled at :20 and :50. With an odd number in the category, you can schedule one Heavy per quarter hour, play the songs in numerical order and they will float around the hour positions of the days during the week, receiving airplay at different times in each daypart. (Read about Schedule Grids for more on this.)

If you are going to format four Power Currents an hour, you should have either eleven, thirteen or fifteen titles in the category. Playing one per quarter hour, eleven songs will give you a 2:45 turnover; thirteen will give you a 3:15 turnover; fifteen will give you 3:45

You could use 10 songs in the rotation group but format only 3 Power's per hour. That would produce a 3:20 turnover. You may want to experiment with other

combinations, but always remember: Use an odd number of songs in the rotation group if you format an even number of Powers each hour. Use an even number of songs if you format an odd number of Powers each hour.

SECONDARY CURRENT ROTATION (MEDIUM)

This group is comprised of new records on the way up (recent additions to library) and well established hits on their way down (they've been into the top rotation but are not longer the 'hottest' in appeal.

If you aren't using music scheduling software, you'll need to a simple rotation system to allow the jocks some flexibility for selecting Medium currents. The Rolodex card-file system works well for this. With this system, you put the title and disc/cart number of each song on a card. The cards are kept in a flat-tray Rolodex file on the control board. The jocks select from the first three or four cards, play the song and place the card in the back of the file. Since the Heavy currents are pre-scheduled, this allows the jocks to balance and pace the musical flow of the hour. For example, if the Heavy Current at 1:10 is a female ballad, you'll probably not want the announcer to play another female ballad from the Medium Current stack next to it, even if that one happens to be the top card in the stack. He'll need to select the second or third card/record to play at 1:14 and hold that female ballad for the next quarter hour opening.

You'll need to clearly orient your announcers about your personal game-plan and rules for music flow and you'll need to consistently monitor their selections to insure they are doing things the way you want. The grid systems works with Announcer Prep sheets (details and example of following pages). Make it a practice to examine at least one day's prep sheets from each announcer each week. For example, you may have told them you don't want to hear two "hard rock" records back to back. One day you'll hear a hard rock Power followed by a hard rock Medium. Or you'll see two of them back to back on the prep sheet. Speak to the jock about it. If you let things like this pass very frequently, before long your music flow will lose the consistency that you desire. It's not that your announcing staff necessarily wants to countermand your

wishes, it's that they are announcers, not programmers. They don't think on such things the way you do unless you keep them focused.

PRIMARY GOLD ROTATION

There are as many different Oldie rotation plans as there are program directors. There are lots of ways to do it right. There is one big way to do it wrong: That's to play non-hits as Oldies. Not every song you add to your Current playlist is going to have staying power, make it to the top of listeners' favorites so they'll still want to hear it in future years. In the long run, only about 20 percent of the new songs added to a Popular music radio station's playlist will have continuing programming value over the next several years. Music is disposable.

An Oldie isn't Golden unless it was a capital H Hit. In my book, that means a Top 10 hit on the national airplay charts and even then many Top 10 records are better buried than retained. If the record didn't have the strength to make it to the Top 10, it will have very little continuing programming value. There are only a few exceptions to the rule.

Formats like AOR (Album Oriented Rock) and Classic Rock that aren't based on "single" hits and need to rely on the individual tracks' performance on the airplay charts. Hit lists are available from other sources as well, including programming consultants and on-line radio industry databases. Smart programmers develop their own databases, keeping song lists and libraries in their personal computer where they regularly review the collection and make adjustments to the content of the various rotation groups.

Your Primary Gold list should be the biggest hits from the last few years, perhaps spiced up with a hand picked selection of the most major hits from earlier years. Except for Oldies and Classic Rock formats, very few records will continue to have programming value after about 10 years. For the majority of records, the cutoff point is five years. The number of songs in the Primary group is up to you. Sit down with pen and pad and figure out various scheduling and rotation plans. If you put 145 songs in the group and play two per hour in a 24-hour day, each one will play about

twice per week. If you use 45 songs and play one per hour, each one will get on the air about three times a week. Decide what you want, how frequently you want the songs in the category to be exposed. Strategize and develop airplay tactics that will construct the kind of music flow and variety you seek. Put your rotation plan into play and on the air for a few weeks and see how it feels. Then make some adjustments and try something else to see if you like it better.

One of the most important things to observe is the daypart flow pattern. Ideally, each song should play in every daypart before it repeats in any one of them.

You can control the Primary Gold rotation with the Rolodex system or with Schedule Grids. Read carefully about Rotation Grids on the following pages.

If you choose, you can divide your Primary Gold into two or more groupings. Since I have always programmed for an Uptempo music flow, I use two Primary Gold rotation groups. Primary Gold A and Primary Gold B. My “A” group is all Uptempo. I format it (schedule it) to play after News and Stopsets and set the turnover at about 3.3 days. The “B” group has songs of all tempos and a slightly longer 3.6 day turnover.

SECONDARY GOLD ROTATION

All the Oldies that aren’t in the Primary Gold rotation are in this group. Remember: Work with Top 10 hits but remain aware that there are a few exceptions to that rule in any format. For example, several Beatles hits were never released as singles and most certainly should’ve been included in the libraries of Top 40, Oldies and Classic Rock stations.

The number of songs in the group is up to you and your programming strategies. The total library can be anywhere from a few hundred to a couple of thousand. The more Gold-intensive your station is, the larger the group should be. As with Primary Gold, I divide Secondary Gold into “A” and “B” groupings. Here, tempo isn’t the prime consideration for me. Age is. The more recent hits, say those from the last six years or so, go into A. The rest go into B. This allows me to subtly adjust the texture of the station. For instance, a Pop station can be adjusted to a slightly “older” appeal during Midday if I program a higher percentage of “B” Golds in that time slot.

If have live announcer shifts and you're not using music scheduling software, the Rolodex system is best for controlling the Secondary Gold rotation. The Grid system doesn't allow enough flexibility for adjustments should the jock discover too many of a certain type of song scheduled in a given hour. And, when working with so many titles, the Grid system is a pain to keep updated.

The Rolodex allows some jock flexibility and also helps prevent record pilferage (if you are using discs.) Give each disc a catalogue number; put the number on the card. When a jock pulls a card and discovers the disc isn't there, have him give the card to you. Run an inventory on the cards each month. You'll know each time a record turns up missing. If you then make everyone aware that you know the record is gone, the thief will be less inclined to push his luck. (And maybe the disc is simply misplaced.)

Review and update your Oldie rotations at least two times per year. You'll need to move some from Primary to Secondary and vice versa. You'll add some and delete some from the lists. Once you've got the system operating the way you want it, it will take care of itself for a while. But don't let it stay the same for long periods of time. Freshen it up.

One other important item: Even if you use music scheduling software, it's still a good idea to get your Gold library entered into a computer database of some sort so you can quickly sort and resort your library by Artist, Title, Rotation, Hit Year, Tempo and Cart/Disk number. In mine, I also keep my own personal 'sound code' or 'style' characteristics and some personal notes

FORMAT TEXTURE

Texture is the basic scheme, or makeup, of your music format. It's the end product of all the elements you weave into it. The surest way to control the texture and flow of your music is to put songs of similar sounds, styles and/or characteristics into individual rotation groups. The most common example of this is the "Image Gold" or "Power Recurrent" rotations many programmers compile and then schedule next to the station ID or out of specific stopsets. You can take it many steps farther. For example,

you could put most of your Dance hits into a dance group; really old Oldies into a “Classic” group; songs with primary teen appeal into a “teen” group; Oldies by top level artists into an “Image” group. Then, you can mix your textures in a myriad of ways. Be careful not to make it too complicated, however. Remember, all the music ever written has used the same few notes. You can run a really fine music mix with only a few rotation groups.

ROTATION GRIDS

The Rotation Grid is a simple contraption designed to plan and control the rotation of songs. You usually don’t want the same Current to play again in the same hour today as it did yesterday. You usually don’t want a Power Gold to repeat again in morning drive until it has played in each of the other four dayparts. So, you give each song in a rotation group a rotation number. You write the song numbers in sequential order into the hour squares on the rotation grid. Then, you can clearly see the rotation patterns; where songs will repeat.

If you don’t have music scheduling software, you really must use rotation grids for your Power Current and Power Gold rotations and any other special rotation groups you develop...especially the ‘short list’ groups.

There is a sample rotation grid for a Power Current rotation on the next page. On this one, I call the rotation group “Red”. I have 13 songs in Red and format 4 Reds per hour. You can see that song #1, which plays in the first quarter hour of the 6am hour on Monday, won’t repeat in that hour until Wednesday, and then it will be fall into the last quarter of the hour. (As you look at that grid, be aware that the number in each box represents the first song to be played in each hour. This one is set up for four songs from the Red group per hour. So, on Monday in the 6am hour, Red songs #1-2-3-and-4 will play. On Wednesday, in the 6am hour, songs 11-12-13-and-1 will play.)

The same grid can be used every week if the placement of songs on the Heavy Current list changes regularly. That means shuffling the order of the songs in the rotation group each week, assigning different numbers to each one.

Note to computer music schedulers: Some music scheduling software (like *Music1*) automatically display rotation grids. If yours doesn't do this, it's a good idea to use grid worksheets as you set up or change your computer system. Look at your rotation patterns on a grid. Then you can make adjustments before you put the computer into play. Song rotations are always the end result of two things. 1) how many songs are in the category. 2) how many times in the hour, day, week the category is formatted. Fifteen songs in one category might not work out well, while eighteen songs would be perfect. Working with rotation grids, you can easily 'see' your the repetition pattern your individual songs will have.

With the Grid system, as you 'number' the songs in each category, take care to spread songs that are similar, distribute them throughout the list. Avoid having Slow songs in positions 4, 5, 6 and 7. It would be better to have the Slow songs in positions 4, 7 and 10. This is important because if the announcers have to make switches of pre-scheduled songs during the hour, they won't have a similar song as the next number. For example, if a Recurrent #7 doesn't 'fit' at 6:15 because it is a ballad, you tell the announcers to flip it with Recurrent #8, playing that one at 6:15 and then playing Recurrent #7 in the next slot where #8 normally would have been. If both #7 and #8 were ballads, the announcers would have to have extra instructions about how to handle the situation. The more adjusting they have to do, the greater the chance your rotations will become inconsistent, the greater chance they'll pick something that is not to your liking.

Be aware that the more categories you pre-schedule with rotation grids within each hour, the greater chances will be for formatting conflicts. For example, say you do not wish to have three Slow songs in a row. Depending on the way the numbers fall, you could get a pre-scheduled run of Slow songs, one each from Heavy Current, Recurrent and Power Gold. This kind of thing will normally happen. When it does, you train the jocks to 'flip' the Recurrent in 'this' slot with the next Recurrent. But if you are pre-scheduling much more than half of your hours' music content, it will become more difficult for the announcers to move songs that are pre-scheduled around to different positions while still maintaining proper music flow. Maybe they won't be

able to flip the Recurrent at 6:15 with the one at 6:45 because the Recurrent scheduled for 6:15 doesn't fit the next slot well either because of other formatting rules conflicts with other songs that are pre-scheduled at 6:41 and 6:49.

There is simply no way that music rotation schedule grids (or music scheduling software either, for that matter) can be set up so that all of the songs will fall into proper alignment without human intervention and adjusting. I think it is better to pre-schedule only about half of the hour with rotation grids and then allow the announcers some flexibility to make music flow adjustments as needed than to try to pre-schedule everything and then have the announcers trying to figure out to keep the numbers 'straight' and still maintain proper music flow.

	<u>Mon.</u>	<u>Tue.</u>	<u>Wed.</u>	<u>Thu.</u>	<u>Fri.</u>	<u>Sat.</u>	<u>Sun.</u>
6am	1	6	11	3	8	13	5
7am	5	10	2	7	12	4	9
8am	9	1	6	11	3	8	13
9am	13	5	10	2	7	12	4
10am	4	9	1	6	11	3	8
11am	8	13	5	10	2	7	12
12n	12	4	9	1	6	11	3
1p	3	8	13	5	10	2	7
2p	7	12	4	9	1	6	11
3p	11	3	8	13	5	10	2
4p	2	7	12	4	9	1	6
5p	6	11	3	8	13	5	10
6p	10	2	7	12	4	9	1
7p	1	6	11	3	8	13	5
8p	5	10	2	7	12	4	9
9p	9	1	6	11	3	8	13
10p	13	5	10	2	7	12	4
11p	4	9	1	6	11	3	8
12m	8	13	5	10	2	7	12
1a	12	4	9	1	6	11	3
2a	3	8	13	5	10	2	7
3a	7	12	4	9	1	6	11
4a	11	3	8	13	5	10	2
5a	2	7	12	4	9	1	6

Hot Current Grid: This grid is for a Current music category with 13 songs in the group. Playing four from the group per hour gives a 3:15 turnover. The number in each box represents the rotation number of the first of four Heavy Current to be played in the hour

	<u>Mon.</u>	<u>Tue.</u>	<u>Wed.</u>	<u>Thu.</u>	<u>Fri.</u>	<u>Sat.</u>	<u>Sun.</u>
6am							
7am							
8am							
9am							
10am							
11am							
12n							
1p							
2p							
3p							
4p							
5p							
6p							
7p							
8p							
9p							
10p							
11p							
12m							
1a							
2a							
3a							
4a							
5a							

Here's a grid form you can copy and use.

CALCULATING MUSIC ROTATIONS

“Tight” rotations, the categories with the highest repetition factor (like, Power Currents) usually work best when you follow the Even/Odd Rule. If you have an odd number of titles, use an even number of songs from the group each hour. Example: If your Heavy Current rotation has 13 titles (an odd number), format your clocks with 4 Heavy Currents per hour.....If you have 10 titles in Heavy, format 3 cuts per hour. In most instances the Even/Odd Rule will prevent songs from repeating in the same hour for 2 or 3 days. When it does repeat in the same hour, it should fall into a different quarter of the hour.

Here are rotation formulas you need to use to plan your rotation patterns:

For Rotations in which ALL titles play every day. This would be your Currents and maybe a short Recurrent list.

FORMULA: Divide total number of “plays” by the total number of songs in the rotation group. Then divide the total number of hours by the play-number.

Example:

- Four Medium Currents are played each hour. Medium Current Rotation has 25 titles.

- 4 per hour X’s 24 hours in the day = **96** Medium Current “plays” per day.

96 divided by 25 titles = **3.84** plays per day

24 hours divided by 3.84 plays = 6.3 hour turnover.

.3 X’s 60 Minutes = 18 minutes

So, Medium Currents will turn over approximately every 3 hours and 18 minutes.

When your calculations give you a turnover that is very near a number that can evenly be multiplied to a total of 24, you may want to make an adjustment. Four hours, for example, divides equally into 24 hours. Which means that all the Medium Currents would tend to get repeat plays at very near the same time they played on the previous day. It would be better, in that case, to either add enough songs to the group, which would give a near 4:30 turnover, or to take enough songs out of the group to give an

approximate 3:30 turnover. Turnovers near 3, 4, 6, 8 and 12 hours will all result in songs playing near the same time, day after day.

For Rotations in which titles do not repeat for 1 or more days.

FORMULA: Divide the total number of Songs in the rotation group by the number of times the group is formatted each day. Next, multiply the fraction by 24 (hours). Then multiply that fraction by 60 (minutes).

Example:

Power Gold list has 231 songs. You format 3 Power Golds per hour.

3 (per hour) X's 24 (hours in day) = **72** "plays" per day.

231 (songs) divided by 72 = **3.2** day turnover.

.2 (days) X's 24 (hours in day) = **4.8** hours.

.8 (hours) X's 60 (minutes in hour) = **48** minutes.

So, Power Gold will turn over, on average, every 3 days 4 hours and 48 minutes.

I set up all Gold and Recurrent rotations to turn over "X-number of days plus 5 to 7 hours". The 5 to 7 hours is the important number, because that way songs will generally rotate through all five dayparts before repeating in any one of them.

THE GOLD LIBRARY

By another name: Oldies. What "Gold" is is a matter of formatting semantics. Some PD's call a song Gold as soon as it moves out of Recurrent rotation. That would be about 18 months, typically. To other PD's, songs become Gold at the 2 year mark. If you haven't been in the business long enough to have sufficient experience to compile a competitive Gold library it would be wise to purchase a list. Some research companies and most programming consultants have them available. (I provide Country music lists.)

Otherwise, buy the Whitburn Billboard Chart lists and begin developing your own lists. Play nothing that wasn't a Top 10 hit in your format. What follows now is the basic rotation plan which can serve as a guide for your own formatting strategy.

SUGGESTED ROTATION OPTIONS

In the absence of music software, the simplest method for rotation control is with the flat-tray Rolodex file, Rolodex cards and quarter-inch stick-on dots. I used colored dots and a specific color for each of the categories. Type the title and artist and the song's library or cart number on the card and one the disc if you're using them. Instruct the jocks to select their Oldies from the first four cards in the file and to place the card to the rear of the file when they play the song.

Don't put any songs in the control room unless they are okayed for airplay. If your songs are on hard-drive it may be a little more difficult to prevent unwanted play. Depending on your system, the automation system software may make it easy to lock-out unapproved songs. If you have a music-on-hard drive automation system, you should regularly call up and review the as-played log history to ensure nothing is being played in conflict of your orders.

The Gold List should be divided into at least two groups; let's call them Primary and Secondary. The Primaries are the strongest cuts. For more controlled Oldies programming, you can preschedule your Primary category with rotation grids. To do this, I suggest setting up TWO groups of Primaries; Primary A and Primary B. Here's how it would work with 75 songs in one group (Primary A) and 77 songs in the other (Primary B). Number the songs in each group consecutively. Use a different color-dot for each group. On your format clock, schedule one Primary from each group each hour. Use schedule grids and play them in numerical order. Primary A group will turn-over every three days and three hours; Primary B group will turn-over every three days and five hours and the same two songs won't show up in the same hour for a very long time.

You can easily alter the exposure your Power Oldies are getting by using a longer or shorter list in each group. You could choose to have only one Primary group with, say, 57 titles. Schedule one per hour and you have about a 2-1/2 day turnover.

Or, you could have one Up-tempo Primary group and one Down-tempo group and schedule them at opportune times in your format hour. (Hint: always use an odd number of titles in each group and have a different total number of titles in each group.)

Or, you could have one Up-tempo Primary group and one Down-tempo group and schedule them at opportune times in your format hour. Or, you could elect to update your Primary Golds each week. If you used 27 titles and scheduled one per hour, each one would get on the air about 6 times and would be played in almost every daypart. The next week, you move those 27 back to ‘regular’ Gold and replace them with a different 27 titles. This keeps refreshing your Gold category week after week. (This type of system is sometimes called “platooning”.)

I’ve used many different rotation schedules and I tend to go in cycles. One month, I’ll use a limited list and change the selections every week. Then I’ll put in a long Primary list and leave it alone for two months. Experimenting, trying different rotations is interesting. You find you can subtly adjust the texture and tempo of your station in many ways.

The point is no one rotation is right in all situations. And no one rotation is right forever. As long as you are playing Hits, there’s very little chance you’ll screw things up. But if you leave things static for too long, your music selection will become stale.

Current Playlist Set-up

On a following page is an example of my weekly Current list from the past. It’s not a ‘chart’, the numerical order of songs on the playlist is for rotation control only and does not indicate the relative popularity or programming value of the song.

The number in parenthesis after the artist name indicates the number of weeks the song has been on the playlist. In the column on the right side of the page, the number before the title or artist name indicates where the song has moved in the numerical order.

It’s a good idea to type a new Current playlist each time you make rotation changes...usually weekly...and to keep all your past lists in a binder for future reference.

You may need to check back to see how long you had the song in Power, you should always be aware of how long each song has been in play. Music scheduling software does this for you, of course.

HEAVY CURRENT

Heavy is the Power rotation; the songs that get the most airplay. I use these two words interchangeably. This group of songs is most prominently responsible for determining the image of a Current-based music station. This collection of titles should be the ‘hottest’ records on the playlist; the songs that you feel have the most universal appeal across all your listener demographics or sub-groups. Most programmers will not move a new song into Heavy until it has been on the playlist for at least six to eight weeks, long enough to have become familiar with the majority of regular listeners and to have generated enough positive response from listeners indicating it truly is a top-level programming unit. I personally like to occasionally add a new song straight to Power when I am particularly excited about it and have confidence in its hit potential. This strategy is, however, a delicate thing. If I make too many ‘wrong’ calls and place too many less-than-stellar performers into my Heavy rotation group, it will have negative impact on my station’s listenership. Listeners like new songs, but they only like HIT new songs. That’s the catch; you can’t know for sure that it’s a Hit until you get it on the air so your listeners can be the jury

Powers should pre-scheduled and played in numerical order, formatted for either three or four per hour. The schedule grid example (a few pages back) shows the *first* Power Current (called RED there) to be played each hour. The remaining three within each hour fall naturally into place.

Thirteen Heavys and one per quarter hour gives a 3:15 turnover. This rotation schedule is one that has performed best for me in the formats I have programmed; Country, Hot A/C and CHR (Top 40). By that I mean, I have been most comfortable with the returns my stations have received in audience ratings. My theory about it is this: The Arbitron ratings show that the average time spent listening (TSL) to these formats is typically between 10 and 13 hours per week. So, one can surmise that with a

3:15 turnover, the average listener will hear each of the Heavy Currents approximately three times each week. It seems to work out well for me as the stations I've programmed have mostly increased in listenership after I arrived and maintained their ratings while have been their pilot.. However, I have not programmed other formats and it has been many years since I handled a CHR station. Today it is quite common for a Top 40 station in the US to spin its Heavy rotation with a 2 hour turnover, a very high repetition. As you make your formatting plans, be aware of what other stations across your nation are doing with their rotations but don't be afraid to follow your intuition and try something different.

The turnover time of the Heavys may be increased or decreased by adding or subtracting the number of titles in the group. This should most always be done in increments of two. If you format an even number of Heavys per hour, there should always be an odd number of songs in Heavy, otherwise the songs tend to be played too frequently at very near the exact same time during the week.

Extra Rotation Check: Most all listeners have their own generally consistent listening patterns. They tend to listen at the same times each day, and they tend to tune in and out several times a day. Try to learn and remain aware of such things so you can make tactical rotation adjustments. For example, most Americans drive to and from their jobs each day and so are commuting in their cars with the radio playing at a very consistent time. And the largest majority of them are on an 8-hour workday. With that in mind, I look at my rotation grids and consider how the plan relates to a 9-to-5 workday. I want to assure that I avoid having the same songs that play in the 8-9 AM hour (while they drive to work) repeat in the 5-6 PM hour (while they are driving home). If people hear the same songs going to and returning from work during their commute several times a week, they'll quickly get the impression that my station has a very limited number of records that we play over and over. This will be especially true of they hear a song they don't personally like twice in the same day as they do their to-and-from commuting. If I see my "standard" workday shift separation is okay, I feel more comfortable.

MEDIUM CURRENT

The Medium Current category contains the most titles on each weekly playlist. Unless music software is being used, I use the rotation grid system to pre-schedule six, sometimes seven of the 12-14 records played each hour (the Heavys, Primary Golds and Recurrents). I leave the rotation of the Medium Currents and Secondary Golds flexible and mostly announcer-controlled. It is important to orient the announcers about the general preferences I have about music flow, the formatting rules I want them to follow. For example, I don't want more than two ballads in a row. I want to avoid having more than two female singers in a row. If I have 'novelty' songs in the library, I don't want more than one of them to be played within any 60 minute time-frame. Using the rotation grid and rolodex card system, or any other plan for that matter, some formatting no-no's will naturally be encountered. The announcer's 'next' song will be in conflict with a formatting rule. The announcers must be instructed, trained and continually coached in order to assure they consistently make correct decisions.

Some PD's like to post a list of "don'ts" concerning music flow in the control room. A better strategy is to explain verbally to each announcer the kind of sound the station seeks to maintain. Then, once a week the PD should review the music flow from two or three hours from each airshift. If he sees a music segment that isn't quite right, he should bring it to the attention of the DJ, explaining why the segment was wrong and how it could have been better balanced. If they clearly understand what is expected, most DJs will do their best to follow-through.

In general, a well-paced music flow avoids extremes. Some examples of 'extremes': a Classic Rock station may want to avoid having more than two Heavy Metal songs in a row; a Country music station should avoid having two 'drinkin' songs back to back. A Contemporary Hit station may want to avoid consecutive plays of two 'rap' songs or having too many 'dance' songs in the hour. A 'Nostalgia' station may want to avoid having too many instrumental hits within an hour.

Country Playlist Advisory #1173

Since 1981

HEAVY

- 1 Take A Back Road-Rodney Adkins (8)
- 2 Long Hot Summer-Keith Urban (6)
- 3 You and Tequila-Kenny Chesney (12)
- 4 Remind Me...Paisley/Underwood (10)
- 5 Dirt Road Anthem...Jason Aldean (16)
- 6 Made In America-Toby Keith (6)
- 7 Just A Kiss...Lady Antebellum (14)
- 8 Baggage Claim-Miranda Lambert (2)
- 9 Knee Deep...Zac Brown Band (14)
- 10 Barefoot Blue Jean Night...Jake Owen (16)
- 11 Cost of Living-Ronnie Dunn (8)

MEDIUM

- 12 Am I The Only One...Dierks Bentley (18)
- 13 Bait A Hook...Justin Moore (2)
- 14 Honey Bee...Blake Shelton (18)
- 15 Let's Don't Call It A Night-Casey James (0)
- 16 Hunt You Down...J T Hodges (8)
- 17 Bulletproof...Steel Magnolia (0)
- 18 All Your Life...The Band Perry (2)
- 19 One More Drinkin' Song...Jerrod Neiman (12)
- 20 I Love You This Big...Scotty McCreery (10)
- 21 Homeboy...Eric Church (18)
- 22 Hell on Heels-Pistol Annies (6)
- 23 Fish-Craig Campbell (12)
- 24 Mr. Bartender-Bradley Gaskin (18)
- 25 God Gave Me You...Blake Shelton (4)
- 26 Here For A Good Time...George Strait (8)
- 27 Where Country Grows...Ashton Shepherd (4)
- 28 Take It Off...Joe Nichols (14)
- 29 Drink In My Hand...Eric Church (0)
- 30 Love Done Gone...Billy Currington (16)
- 31 Country Girl (Shake It)...Luke Bryan (12)
- 32 Tough...Kellie Pickler (10)
- 33 Just Fishin'...Trace Adkins (20)
- 34 Carry My Body Down...Nick 13 (4)
- 35 Everything and All...Randy Travis (2)

NEW ADDS

- 15 casey james
17 steel magnolia
29 eric church

Move to Heavy

- 6 toby
8 miranda

Move to Medium

- 12 dierks

Move to Recurrent

- tomorrow...young

Drop

- my heart can't...sara

under consideration

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------|
| *ashton shepard | *reba | gill |
| mont gentry | gokey | |
| | eric paslay | |
| *river road | | |
| craig morgan | *steel magnolia | |

here's an example of how I maintain my Currents list. The numbered positions are not a Top 10, just a numerical listing. The numbers in parenthesis are the number of weeks the songs have been on the List. "under consideration" are new ones I'm currently auditioning, considering for playlist add.

PLAYLIST MAINTENANCE

If you don't yet have music scheduling software, you have to update and maintain your playlist manually. Using the rotation grid system, here's how I did it before the computer age.

Supplies Needed:

- Black felt-tip marker

- Quarter-inch stick-on dots in Red (for Heavy), Yellow (Medium) and Green (Recurrent) and other colors of your choice for your Oldies categories.

For carted music, you will also need:

- Flat-tray Rolodex card file
- A supply of Rolodex cards (size 2-1/2" by 4")

If you transfer your music to tape carts, or if your music is ripped into a music-on-hard drive system which is used without a music scheduler, then each song in Medium and in your Oldies library will need a Rolodex card. On the card, type the song's title and the artist. Mark the song's playlist number on two dots. Stick one dot on the card, stick the other on the tape cart or on the CD's jewel box. Put the song in the control room rack, put the card in the Rolodex tray. Set the tray on the console at the announcer's fingertips. Rolodex supplies oversized cards which you can use to separate your cards by category.

You may want to make cards for your Heavy's, but if you are using the Prep Sheets and Schedule Grid system, the cards are unnecessary. Since Power Currents are played in numerical order, the jocks will know which songs to play and when. You will need to put numbered dots on the Heavy carts or discs, of course.

When updating the playlist each week, type a new card for each of the new adds. Stick a dot on the cart or disk and another on the card. Then make two new dots for each song that has moved to a different Current rotation group. Stick the new number on each cart/disk and card. Always have an updated print-out in the control room which shows the title and number of every song in the library to announcers and cross-reference and find any one quickly and easily.

If you play records or CDs, you'll need to stick the numbers on the discs. Do acquire some attractive boxes which allow the discs to sit upright so the jocks can flip through them conveniently.

Format Clocks

There is no great science involved in a format clock. Every programmer has his/her own tactics for positioning things, but the most important principles are balance

and consistency. The clock should show where the News (if any) should be in the hour. It should show the approximate positions in the hour where you want your spot breaks, promos, weather reports, PSA's and music sweeps to fall. And it should show the music schedule, by category. The only constant rule, I believe, is that the newscasts should be at the top of the hour. (See the section titled "News Placement" for more on this).

The "Sweep The Quarter hour" Myth:

In all areas of human activity there are some things that are done in a certain way simply because "that's the way it's always been around here". People perform the activity, not knowing why the particular technique came into being. There are certainly such things in radio programming and I give you this example to demonstrate the need for original thinking, for questioning the status quo and for developing your own tactics and philosophies, even if they are not-standard.

In the US in the late 1960s a strategy called "sweeping the quarter hour" spread throughout the business. It meant one should not have commercial breaks at :00, :15, :30 or :45, instead there should be a 'music sweep' of at least three songs in a row in those positions. This was based on a mistaken belief about the Arbitron listener diary. Arbitron is the US radio audience measurement company. It places 'diaries' with listeners who record a weeks' listening. On each of the seven days, participants are supposed to log the stations they listen to, when they tuned in, when they tuned out, and then mail it to Arbitron which uses all the returned diaries to produce audience ratings. One of the most important elements in these ratings reports is the "quarter hour" figure, how many listeners the station has in the average quarter hour. To get 'credit' for a quarter-hour's listening, the person must enter a minimum of five minutes' listening. The belief among radio program directors came to be that if an Arbitron diary entry showing listening from :12 to :17, that five minutes would give the station two quarter-hours credit. In fact, such an entry would give the station NO credit at all. Odd, but true! To get an Arbitron quarter-hour credit, the diary-keeper must have logged five minutes listening within a discrete quarter-hour. So, if the listener logged

five minutes' listening from :12 to :17, the Arbitron methodology would not count it at all, the listed station would get *no* listening credit for that particular entry.

For the “sweep the quarter hour” concept to work, the spot breaks must fall between :05 & :10, :20 & :25, :35 & :40 and :50 & :55. This can be done some of the time. But it can't be done consistently by very many stations. Few songs are 2:30 minutes long any more, as was common in the early days of Top 40 radio. And our commercial loads vary from day to day and from hour to hour. And, of course, very few Arbitron diary keepers are absolutely precise about logging their minutes of listening in the ratings diary. It is common for them to round-off to five minutes or to the quarter-hour. A person who listened from :11 to :20 often logs it as :10 to :20 or, more likely from :15 to :30.

So, decade after decade that mistaken idea took held strong and across the US virtually all music stations still place their commercial breaks at :10, :20, :40 and :50. Scan the dial at :40 minutes past the hour and see for yourself. Virtually every station will be in a commercial break. And now, few programmers even know why they do this. It is one of those “that's just how we all do it” kind of things.

If you want to place the quarter-hour sweep on your format clocks, okay, but don't get an ulcer if the spot breaks often fall too close to :15, :30, :45 or :60. It is not going to ‘cost’ you anything. But if the programming as a whole isn't very good, a quarter-hour music sweep won't help your ratings. And, if the programming is good, listeners will stay with the station regardless of where the spot breaks fall.

(In the 2000's, Arbitron began moving to a people-meter system, placing electronic devices with participants. The meters “hear” the stations the person comes into contact with during the week and reports back to the Big Daddy computer. As I write this, the system is having a dramatic effect on the programming tactics of major market US radio. The quarter-hour sweep thing is beginning to fade, but not the basic tactic of the sweep itself.)

MUSIC POSITIONING

When a station doesn't have music scheduling software, my formatting strategy is to pre-select about half the music each hour and to allow the jocks to select the rest.

I generally recommend placing one Heavy in each quarter-hour, two Power Oldies in each hour and one or two Recurrents each hour. The Mediums Currents and other Golds are mixed and placed in between these.

The format clock examples I use here call for three or four Oldies per hour. You may choose to use more or less. If you use more, drop one Medium for each Oldie you add. If you use less, add one Medium for each Oldie you delete.

Running Long Place either a Medium or an Oldie at the end of each half-hour. Then, if the jock has to drop a record, he won't be dropping a more important Heavy or Power Oldie.

Running Short Decide what the jocks are to fill with when they need to play an extra song in a half-hour. I suggest filling at the bottom of the hour with a Medium Current and filling at the top of the hour with a Secondary Gold.

Coming Out of News: There are many theories about which kinds of songs should be played coming out of a Newscast and other non-music programs. Some believe a Power Oldie should be used. Others believe it should be a very hot Current hit. I don't believe it is all that critical and perhaps the best thing to do is to vary it. Come out with an Oldie sometimes, a Recurrent or a Current at others. But, I do believe it should be an Uptempo song as I want to inject some energy into the flow after the extended talk segment.

How Many Clocks?

You need just a few basic format clocks. One for News Hours and another for Non-News hours. You also need a clock for each hour that is significantly different from the two basics. For example, if you have Traffic reports you'll need a clock for those hours.

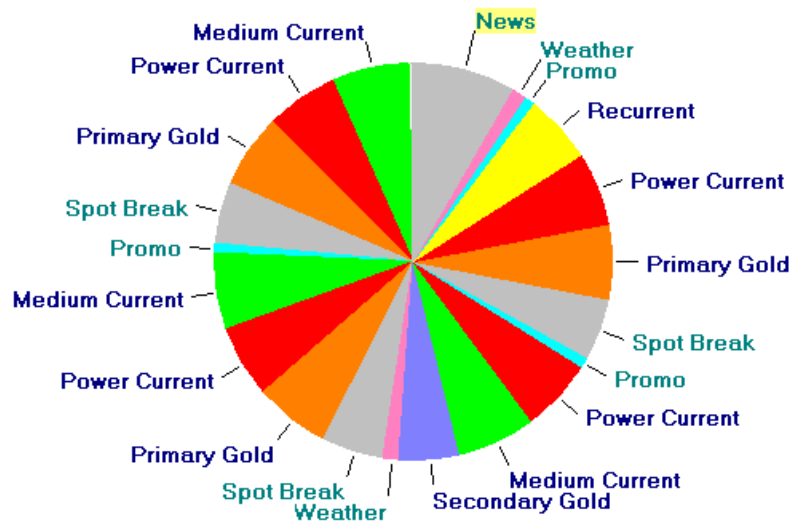
Change your format clocks and music rotation schedules every now and then, every few months or so. Don't let the same clocks run forever. It gets boring to the

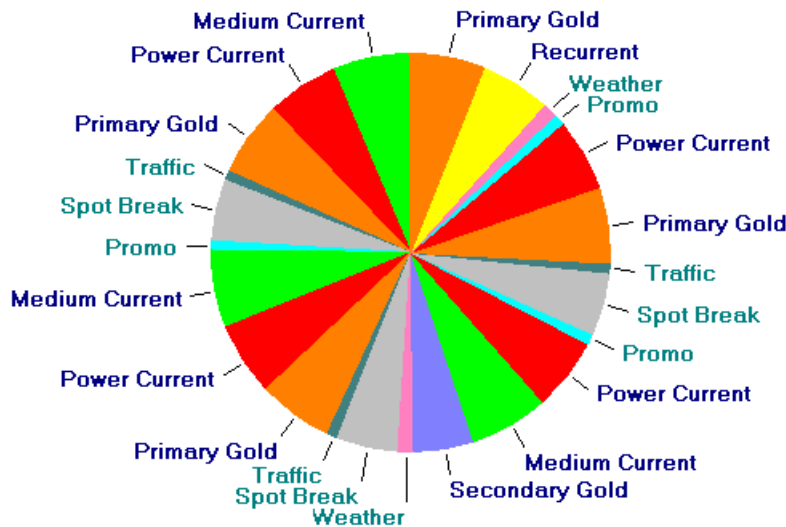
announcers and perhaps overly predictable for listeners. If a listener is not particularly fond of Oldies and comes to know that your station always plays one following the news, that person may eventually come to realize that when your Newscast starts, he'll have a good eight to ten minutes to go dial-surfing to see what other stations may be playing. That's not something you want to encourage.

DRAWING YOUR FORMAT CLOCKS

If you have to draw clocks manually, a CD makes a fine circle on a page. I spent decades drawing them with 45 rpm records. Use broad strokes and lots of colors as you draw your clocks. If you use regular sized paper, put the finished product in plastic page protectors to protect them when you post them in the control room. If you're using music scheduling software (and most now are), the software should have the ability to print the clock for you.

You can use the examples in this manual as a general guide for constructing your format hours. My scheduling software *Music 1* prints the clocks and also puts a grid across the bottom of the page that shows each of the hours in the week where the clock is used. (*Music 1* was used to make these clocks.)





POWER CURRENT ROTATION CHECK

Songs have the most impact when people hear them when they are alone. Most Americans drive to work alone. If people hear a Current that they don't particularly like more than a few times on their way to and from work in a week, it can accentuate the impression that "the station plays the same songs over and over".

Of course, the flip side of this is that people could hear their personal favorite five or six times a day without complaining. Repetition of a Current is only a problem when the song that repeats is "one I don't like". Since almost every song, even the biggest of hits, has detractors, it is important to plan the Power Current rotation carefully because these are the ones that will have the most impact on your station image, both positive and negative.

The most important hours to check are those around the standard 9-to-5 workday. Watch carefully the songs that are scheduled for play between 8-9 AM and 5-6 PM. If rotation is acceptable to you there in the "standard" workday schedule, all others should be okay, too.

Here's an example of typical mathematics:

Say you format three Power Currents per hour times these two hours (8-9 and 5-6) times five weekdays equals 30 Power Current-plays per week in the two

primary-drive-time hours. And you have 13 Power Currents. Divided into thirty we get an average 2.3 plays for each song each week in the to-and-from-work hours. If you see any songs repeating more than four times in those two hours, you should take steps to better schedule the spread.

If you are formatting your music manually, a Schedule Grid for your Power Currents will show the precise positions of all the songs during the week. Most music scheduling software has a “play history” feature which will show you the same thing.

ANNOUNCER ELEMENTS

Spread throughout this Manual are guidelines for the various things that announcers should include in a typical hour. As you sit down to instruct and critique your announcing staff, here are the most important elements:

(a checklist form follows the list)

STATION IDENTIFICATION

One popular school of thought is that the Calls/Slogan/Frequency should be the first thing out of the announcer’s mouth every time the mike is opened. I don’t believe that is really necessary for three reasons. 1) It makes for some very unusual sentence structure.....like how many “real” sentences begin with call letters? 2) Announcers begin “toss off” the call letters when they have to be spoken first, under pronouncing the station’s name, just saying it mindlessly by rote. 3) If the station is doing its job, listeners remember which one they’re listening to.

My basic rule is that Calls/Slogan/Frequency must be said at least once every time the mic is opened. In most stopsets that means the announcer will identify the station after a song, prior to going into the spot cluster. And again after the cluster going into the next song. Station identification doesn’t have to be the FIRST thing out of his mouth as long as it’s in the rap somewhere.

Most stations use only Call letters and Frequency as identifiers. Others also have a slogan: “The Hot FM”, “All Oldies All The Time”, etc. The program directors of such stations often insist that all three elements be spoken in every rap, usually as the

first thing said when the mike is opened. So, fifteen to thirty times an hour, listeners will hear the announcer say something like: “98.5, *WXYZ, All Oldies All The Time.*” I don’t believe all three elements need to be included in every announcer rap. Two is enough. It seems more fresh and vibrant to me if the identifiers are varied. One break they can use Calls and Slogan, “*WXYZ, all oldies all the time*”. Next can be Slogan and Frequency, “*All oldies all the time, 98.5.*” Next can be Calls and Frequency, “*WXYZ, 98.5.*” If all three are used together sometimes, of course it is okay. But I wouldn’t want to hear an announcer say “98.5, *WXYZ, All Oldies All The Time.*” every time the mike was opened. Avoid the redundancy and the use of so many “required” syllables break after break after break.

News announcers should also include station identifiers. However, they should concentrate exclusively on Calls and Frequency only. Leave the station Positioning slogan to the entertainers, the jock staff.

POSITIONING STATEMENTS

Any station is well served by having a ‘signature’ voice delivering recorded Positioning Statements. In most cases, you’ll want to have a great “warm” voice, someone not on your staff because all their voices are being used consistently and frequently on commercials and promos heard on your station. The voice can be male or female or you may want to have both. In some stations a ‘character’ voice might be a benefit. For example, one of the great success stories of the late 90s was a Country station in Dallas that used a well-known character actor (Barry Corbin) as the signature voice. He didn’t have a voice or delivery that was anything at all like the ‘signature’ voices on other stations. He had a twang, a Texas-drawl. It was unique, dynamic and attention grabbing.

There are a lot of professional voices to choose from, you can find them advertising their work in the classified sections of the trade press. Some will provide the product fully produced. Others will supply only ‘dry’ voice to which you must add catchy production sounders and music. Format these “signatures” each hour to be used a minimum of twice an hour, a maximum of 4 times an hour. You should have a couple dozen and they should be freshened at least twice a year.

Since your own announcers will be using many of the same phrases as your “signature voice”, you should guard against overuse of these phrases you have prerecorded by the announcers, however. Sometimes between the recorded stagers and the live delivery by the announcing staff the same phrase could be used 4-5-6-7 times in an hour. That gets tired quickly.

TIME CHECKS

A ‘time check’ is shorthand for: saying the time. Morning Drive should include a time check every time the mike is opened. Other shifts should time check every 8-10 minutes. That is the minimum. They may time check more often, as they wish, but I wouldn’t do it more than once per break. If the announcer time checks going into the commercial cluster, he doesn’t need a time check coming out of it.

The word “o’clock” shouldn’t be used. It’s redundant.

WEATHER

AM drive should have a weather report (a weather ‘brief’ will do) every ten minutes (in addition to the weather report in News). Other shifts should have weather twice an hour (in addition to weather in the News)....except in cases of “unusual” weather. If a storm front is moving in, listeners expect to hear something about it as soon as they turn on the radio. So, in severe weather all announcers should double their weather reports and do four per hour, or maybe even more frequently. In most markets, the local cable service now has a ‘weather radar’ channel. And a computer with internet connection in the control room provides everything needed.

If the weather is uneventful...if it’s just a normal day, there’s no reason to be absolutely precise in the report. A conversational ad-lib style works well. *“Nothing but clear skies in the forecast. Highs today will be in the mid-50’s. Down to the low 30’s tonight. It’ll be about the same tomorrow. Current temperature here at WXYZ is 53 degrees”*

QUARTER-HOUR TEASE

This is anything designed to entice the listener to keep listening just a little while longer. There should be three quarter hour teases in a typical hour.

The most common tease is a mention of upcoming-artists. As in: *“coming up, Sinatra, Elvis and your favorite song....”*

While the artist list does fit the definition for a tease, I believe it's reached the saturation point. Every station now does it. So, since your direct format competitors all do artist-list teases, whenever you do it, you broadcast an element of "sameness" which doesn't serve you well.

In place of the artist-list, announcers should be doing some homework so they'll have unique things to say about upcoming music. *"Coming up Beyonce' with the song that won Video Event Of The Year at last year's MTV awards...."*

It is perfectly acceptable for an announcer to use and re-use the same "unique" tease after a period of time. If he pre-plugs a song in a certain way today, he may re-use it on another day. Also, it is fine for announcers to use the same tease that others have used. If the morning drive guy teases: *"Today is Phil Collins' birthday and I've got one of his #1 songs coming up..."*, there's no reason the other announcers can't use that information for their teases, as well. Chances of the same group of listeners hearing the same tease are small...and even if a listener does hear it again, it's no problem. Good is good, and radio works best with repetition of its elements.

News reports are excellent quarter-hour teases. *"There's been a plane crash in Jackson county. Bob Moody has details from the WABC news room at the top of the hour":*

"Standard" teases should be fulfilled within 15 minutes....if the announcer promises *"I've got an Elvis classic coming up...."* it should be played within the quarter hour and no later.

Teases for "exceptional" programming elements (like an upcoming contest) may be done more than 30 minutes in advance....*"I'll announce the next winning tag number next hour, just after 10:15...."*

RECYCLING

This is anything designed to entice the listener to return to the station in a different daypart or on a different day.

"We'll announce the winning number this afternoon at 3."

“The Eagles play the Tigers Saturday. Game time 1:30 and you can hear it all right here at 99.9fm WABC.”

Produced promos qualify as Recyclers.

There should be at least one recycler each hour...two per hour is better.

LOCAL REFERENCE

Listeners are most comfortable with a “hometown” station. You can’t say your city and area town names too much. Announcers should look for ways to incorporate local identifiers wherever possible. Mention local landmarks (streets, shopping centers, parks). Mention the places people work (*“here’s one for all the people on the second shift at the Whirlpool plant....”*). Mention local events (*“That song reminds me of the merry-go-round at the state fair...”*).

Doing song dedications and including the listeners’ town or neighborhood qualifies as a Local Reference. Putting listener’s voices on the air is a Local Reference.

I have no hard rule about how many Local References should be included in a typical hour because, to a great degree, commercials are local reference. They always have local addresses and they often say the Town name. So, I ask only that the announcers look for ways to include their own local references whenever and wherever possible.

MUSIC IDENTIFICATION

Listeners want to know what the song was and who sang it AFTER it’s played. It is called a ‘backsell.’ They virtually never “hear” intros, so it is much more expedient to use intros for quarter-hour teasers and recyclers. Or, “treat” the listener by giving him ALL of the song’s intro without any talk over the music.

If a song IS going to be intro’d, the intro should be something “special”. *“Here’s the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year, Miranda Lambert and her new hit....”* It is especially important to backsell identify NEW songs on the playlist.

PERSONALITY IDENTIFICATION

The more ‘benchmarks’ that people can remember about your station, the better it is for you because what they remember is more easily translated into ratings numbers. Of course the most important thing for people to remember is your station name, slogan and dial position. It is a great benefit if they can also remember the names of some of your announcers. In general, people do not remember disc jockey names unless the guy/gal is a really extraordinary, unique personality. Or, if he/she has a ‘strange’ name. People won’t remember the name Bill Kelly. They will remember “Crash” Kelly. They won’t remember Julie Tyler. They will remember “Honey” Tyler. No matter how many times they say their ‘normal’ names, it often just doesn’t seem to register in most people’s heads. I’ve seen perceptual research which showed loyal, long-term listeners to a station couldn’t recall the names of any of the announcers they listened to every day. It is a good thing to give your announcers nicknames or special ‘handles’. Announcers want to say their names and usually they’ll be inclined to say their name too much, like every time they open the mike. Put some limits on that. Three, maybe four times an hour should be enough.

CHECK LIST

Just ahead is the Announcer Element check list which includes items listed in this section. You can use it in two ways.

- 1) Announcers could use one form each hour to check off the various elements as they are done.

- 2) You could use the form yourself as you monitor the station either live or with a recorded aircheck to check individual hours for proper content.

There’s extra space beside the Tease and Recycler boxes, so the actual tease or recycler used can be jotted down. Likewise, there’s blank space next to Local Reference so the actual reference can be noted.

You can make a more specific version of a form like this, if desired. For example, under Positioning Statement, you might type in the actual statements you use.

Announcer Element Check List

Station ID

Call Letters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Frequency	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Slogan	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Positioning Statement

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Time Check

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Weather

Full 'cast	☐	☐	☐	☐
WX mention	☐	☐	☐	☐

Quarter Hour Tease

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Recycler

Promo	☐	☐	☐	
Liner	☐	☐	☐	☐

Local Reference

Music ID

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Personality ID

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DJ INSTRUCTIONS: USING THE PREP SHEETS

Note: This heading applies to stations using the manual music rotation system with Music Rotation grids. If you have computerized music scheduling, skip ahead.

Preparing Prep Sheets for each airshift takes less than fifteen minutes. If you take the time to do it, the more able you are to make strategic programming adjustments as your shift progresses.

1) Get to the station early before each shift, get a blank Prep sheet for each hour of your shift.

2) Use the Format Clocks and fill out the Song Class/Category column in correct music schedule order. You'll fill in the boxes with P's (for Power), M's (for Medium Current), PG's (for Power Golds), R's (for Recurrent) etc.

3) Get the Power Current schedule grid and find the number of the first one you will play in each hour, then write the numbers after each P in the Song Class column. The Powers are played in numerical order, so write-in the numbers of all the Powers for the entire shift.

4) Get the schedule grids for other rotation groups and write-in the song numbers for each hour.

5) Get the playlists and write in the titles of the pre-scheduled songs each hour.

6) If station promos or other elements are pre-scheduled, write them in their approximate positions in the ELEMENTS column.

That is all that is required in advance. You will have the titles of five or six songs already scheduled as each hour begins. As the shift progresses, you can plan ahead, using your Medium Currents and optional Oldies to adjust the balance, pacing and flow. Write those titles in as you go. Make notes in the ELEMENTS column to indicate where the spot breaks fall. There are spaces on each side of the page where you can enter the times things play. Use either time-column or both, if you wish.

Some jocks like to write-in other data in advance. You may want to enter your spot breaks in the approximate positions where they will fall, for example. **The better your prepare, the smoother things run.**

programming prep sheet

Day/Date

Hour

Time	Song Cat.	Songs	Elements	Break Time
:00				
:30				
ANNOUNCER				

DOUBLE SHOTS-TRIPLE PLAYS-ETC.

Double Shots are simply two songs by the same artist played back to back. Triple Plays are three-in-a-row by the artist, or, depending on your format, maybe just three-in-a-row without a 'break' between them. These programming elements have a lot of value because the phrases "double shot" and "triple play" easily stick in people's heads. That aids listener recall and helps listeners remember your call letters better because the human memory works through associations. If they remember the catchy phrase, they'll probably remember the Call Letters and Dial Position where they hear it.

Music listeners love Double Shots, so much so that since the 70's it has been common for Album Rock stations to feature 'Two-fer Tuesdays' every week in which they do double-shots the entire day. Of course you don't have to be an album rock station to use it.

If you choose to format an element like this, you may schedule just a few per announcer shift or as many as you want during the day. And, if you do add the element, it **MUST** be promoted. Here's the memo I send to my stations when we install Double-Shots:

To The Air staff:

Double Shots

We feature double shots. Whenever you see two songs by the same artist scheduled back to back be sure to announce something about it. You can do a pre-plug quarter-hour maintenance rap like this:

"I've got a Double Shot of Beyonce' coming up in 10 minutes."

and/or You can do an Intro:

"KFox103 presents a Double Shot of Kenny Chesney, here are his two biggest hits "

and/or, you can backsell:

"There was another KFox103 Double-Shot. The Beatles with Get Back and Eleanor Rigby".

and/or, you can do all three but **ALWAYS** say something about every double shot.

PLAYING CHRISTMAS

Christmas music can be a high impact formatting feature. IF you do it correctly. IF you are unique and your mix doesn't sound like anybody else's. For 'new music' -focused stations, the tired old, traditionals should not be played. Everybody else can

have those. A few tear-jerkers (like the Willie Nelson or Roy Orbison versions of “Pretty Paper”) may be okay, but the best Christmas mix should be Upbeat and Happy. It is the happiest of seasons, after all. If you stress the happy Christmas songs, listeners will respond positively.

Realize many of the “standards” are no longer relevant. Bing Crosby’s “White Christmas” is often cited as the best selling single record of all time and it remains one of the great classics. However, it sounds weird next to almost anything we find on the Current music charts. You can certainly play the song itself, but not the Crosby version unless you are a Nostalgia station. There are always fine newer versions by Contemporary stars. Those are the cuts that should be played.

Play Christmas music competitively. Be selective. Judge Christmas songs in much the same way as you judge new Currents. Don’t play a song simply because it has the word “Christmas” or “Santa” in the title. If you don’t feel really good about the song, don’t let it get on the air.

Programming a good Christmas rotation is a snap. It’s better to play a few good ones in high rotation than to dilute the quality of your playlist with second-rate music. You can program a good seasonal sound with as few as a dozen records. I prefer using between 30 and 40 and a fairly tight rotation. The best strategy is to heavy-up on the “happy” songs early in the season. The more melancholy and religious-oriented songs should come to a peak at about 40% of the rotation group on the last few days of the season.

If you’re not using music scheduling software to schedule the seasonal music, set up your Christmas rotation in one of two ways:

- 1) Number the songs and use a Schedule Grid to pre-schedule the rotation.
- 2) Make a Rolodex card for each cut. Then, have the jocks pull from the first two or three cards in the stack and place to the rear after they’ve played the song.

If the songs aren’t on your automation, hard-drive system, keep the Christmas discs in a box in the control room in numerical order for easy access by the jocks.

Recommended Schedule

Day After Thanksgiving until about December 7th: Two cuts an hour.

December 7th until the 22nd: Three cuts per hour

December 23rd and 24th: Four cuts per hour

You may want to keep a light rotation going a few days after Christmas to accompany all those people who'll be hitting the after-Christmas sales. They'll still be in the spirit. And, some programmers continue to program Christmas music lightly until New Years. If you do that, I recommend using only the five or six cuts that were the most requested during the holidays, and only one per hour.

CHRISTMAS MEMORY SOUND BITES

Here's an idea for Christmas Cheer. Have the request line recorder running. Ask callers "what's your best Christmas memory". (Get their okay to air it.) Or, you could solicit "memories" with on-air announcements.

Splice the best into 10-to-15 second bites. Produce a simple intro with tinkling bells in the background. The intro copy should be something like this:

"K-Fox103, with Tulsa's Christmas memories....(sound bite)"

After the sound bite, segue into a Christmas song.

This is simple to do and sounds very neat on the air. It has excellent "local" appeal. You can save the best of these things and use them year after year, they never wear out.

LISTENER CHRISTMAS SINGS

Another entertaining feature is to record listeners singing familiar Christmas songs acapella. You can solicit callers for this on the air, or just ask random callers to sing a few lines for you. Record and edit the sound bites down to the best 10-20 seconds. Add some production elements, perhaps. Ten to fifteen good 'sings' is all you need. You can rotate them through the season. Schedule the 'sings' as the last element in a stop-set. Make a cold segue from the listener sing into a Christmas song.

HALLOWEEN MUSIC PROGRAMMING

Halloween is a big holiday for families with kids in the US. And it has become quite an occasion for adult parties, too. Programming Country radio, I like to put John Anderson's "Haunted House" into Medium Current rotation for the last three days of the month of October. That song could be used on most Pop formatted stations, too. If you don't have it in-house, get a record store to order it if it's not in stock. It's on his old label, Warner Brothers. Oldies stations would want to look for the original version of the song by Jumpin' Gene Simmons, from 1964. It can also be found on some compilation disks. Another cool song to play is the "Monster Mash" by Bobby 'Boris' Pickett. If it is in your format the full version of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" with the narration by Vincent Price is a lot of fun.

Halloween Atmosphere

On Halloween day, lay some produced sound effects behind the announcers; the kinds of sounds you hear in a good haunted house; creaking doors, wolf howls, witches cackles. You can probably find these things in your stations' sound effects library. If not, search the specialty bin at your record stores to find what you can. A really good thing to do would be to produce a special stager, or several, to lead into the songs. I'd love to hear Vincent Price reading the opening lines of The Raven followed by a segue into a spooky, moody kind of hit song, or one of the titles listed above.

Many stations frequently use music beds behind announcer raps. On Halloween day and evening, you can use highly familiar 'monster' music instead of their regular tracks. Suggestions: the theme music from "The Munsters" and "The Addams Family" TV shows; the music from the movies: "Halloween" and "The Exorcist".

Halloween Promotion

The best thing to do for this 'holiday' is to tie in with best "haunted house" being developed and handled by a civic group. In many towns, the Jaycees or the Lions Club have a haunted house project. Contact them and offer heavy on-air promotion in exchange for attaching your station name as the exclusive radio sponsor.

Run lots of promos and get the station van there every night. Broadcast live breaks. With a recorder in-hand interview people in line and people who have just come out of the house. Have your air personalities go through the haunted house with the recorder running, too, and then edit some sound bites for playback on the air. You can take short sound bites from your tape and make some exceptionally fine promos.

Another idea is to set up several Station “Halloween Houses” in the area. Then run a promo like this:

“Find the WABC Halloween House. After you say ‘trick or treat’ ask everyone ‘is this the WABC Halloween House?’ The first fifty ghosts and goblins who find the WABC Halloween House get an extra special treat, we’ll drop ...(prize)..... into your bag of goodies....”

The prize does not have to be elaborate, but should be desirable. The simplest “good prize” to arrange is Free Home Delivery Of An Extra Large Pizza, with your choice of toppings. (I’ve seen research showing that, as small prizes go, home delivered pizza is at the top of the list.) Movie or event tickets are also good for this kind of thing.

Set up several houses in different sections of town. Again, have a recorder running when the door is opened to record some action for promo use. After each kid finds you, as you give him/her the prize ask them to please not tell other kids that they found you. Otherwise, once you get discovered you’ll get a quick rush from everybody in the neighborhood. Expect that to happen, anyway. Little kids get too excited to keep it to themselves. The main goal will be accomplished: You’ll have kids shouting your station name to homeowners all over town

VALENTINE PROGRAMMING TREAT

Here’s a quick and easy programming special for Valentines Day. First, prepare a list of romantic Love songs for high rotation and airplay on Valentine's Day.

In the week leading up to the day, solicit ‘radio valentines’. Have listeners record brief love notes. Select the best, edit them down to 10-15 seconds. Produce two short Stagers; one to intro the Valentine, another to intro a "Love" Song.

Produced intro/stager music should be something bright and ‘lovely’. Maybe some tinkling wind chimes; or perhaps a solo violin (...the spaghetti dinner in Lady & The Tramp?). It would be okay to use the same stager bed under both the Valentine intro and the Song intro. It would also be good to have some background cosmetics behind the Listener’s voice as she/he says the Valentine.

Twice an hour on Valentines Day run the segment like this:

PRODUCED COPY: *(Station) presents (town/area)’s Radio Valentines .*

LISTENER PHONER: “....*I love you Julie....(etc, etc.)*”

PRODUCED COPY: *(Station) plays the great love songs of Country Music.*

(...or Rock...or Pop....whatever your format.)

SEGUE INTO THE LOVE SONG.

If you do this, make ‘em quick. Anything past 15 seconds starts to drag.

To Collect Valentines, solicit on the air with copy like this:

“(Station) is collecting Radio Valentines. We’d like to hear your Valentine message to the one you love. Call us anytime today . We’ll record your Radio Valentine. On Valentine’s Day, (station) will be playing (city/area)’s Radio Valentines on the air. Record your message on the (station) Valentine Line. The number is _____”

HOLIDAY SPECIALS

Above, I've given some ideas for a few different holidays. There are dozens of 'special' days each year and with some brainstorming with your staff you can find ways to tie-in to the holidays and give your listeners treats and surprises. You can create unique ways to *enhance* those days on your station without changing the essence of your station's music or programming flow. They can be, probably should be very simple. Here’s another example: On both Memorial Day and Veterans Day, I have a liner produced which reads:

Today is Veterans. (Our station) joins together with Americans across the nation to say thank you to the Vets. Thank you for doing what ever had to be done to keep our country free.

Then, I follow the stager with a patriotic song like Lee Greenwood's "God Bless The USA" or Billy Ray Cyrus' "Some Gave All". I play that stager and song at the top of the hour for all 24 hours of the day. Every year, that simple thing draws an exceptional number of thank-you comments from listeners. When you do special things like this, it serves to bind listeners to your station. In an over-saturated media environment, the things that you do *different* are the things that make your station stick in people's heads and keep them loyal to you dial position

