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W.T.D.A

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Or “What’s the digital application?” This has been a question that Jacobs Media has been asking its clients this year. And the economic downturn is all the more reason why broadcasters need to develop a smart digital strategy.

Many components of the old model are breaking down. The time-honored relationship between ratings and sales is eroding. Advertisers are looking for value and accountability. Just selling them 60-second spots (or billboards or Yellow Pages ads) falls short of a 360° digital solution that yields results.

Back during the presidential debates, John McCain and Barack Obama sparred over the question of strategy versus tactics in Iraq. While this argument was largely academic, it is worth revisiting, as radio grapples with how to integrate technology into the fabric of stations.

Starting a texting program because you have the sense that your audience engages in this activity is a *tactic*. Having your jocks set up MySpace pages because a friend of yours is doing this at his station in Denver is a *tactic*. Sending out email blasts to your database urging your listeners to patronize one of your advertisers is a *tactic* (and a bad one).

The digital revolution requires a *strategy*, and to that end, consider a couple of avenues that can help your company or station develop one. First, Seth Godin’s “Meatball Sundae,” is a quick read that nicely defines the difference between just doing digital “stuff” and going deeper by developing an encompassing strategy that forces you to rethink some of the basic premises of how consumers might interact with your station in the coming years. Here’s a quote from the book:

“Smart organizations are investing time and energy into transforming their assets. They know the New Marketing is more than a hot topping. Instead they use New Marketing to dig deep, to redefine what they actually do to add value. The new rules are here and they’re not going away. If your assets are synchronized with what you can do with the New Marketing, you win.”

There’s been a great deal of talk about “content” during the past several years. Exactly what *is* “content” and what do you do with it? Content isn’t playing 40 minutes of “Today’s Best Country.” It’s that proprietary, difficult to duplicate programming that your audience can’t get anywhere else. Some time ago, “The Daily Show’s” Jon Stewart was asked about where his viewers might be accessing his content years from now. Here’s his response:

“We make the doughnuts; we don’t drive the truck. I have no idea. I assume there are people in white lab coats working on that very thing. And I’m sure at some point it will be in liquid form.”

Well, maybe not liquid, but thinking past transmitters and towers, and toward different distribution platforms for your content is a great start. Earlier this year, the RAB’s CEO Jeff Haley laid out his vision for radio’s near-term future:

“Let’s agree here and now that our goal will be to have radio on every mobile phone, PDA, and MP3 player in the next five years. On-air, online, on-site, and on-demand, radio must be anywhere and everywhere there is a speaker or headphones.”

Broadcasters that are developing digital strategies are already thinking along these lines – providing a high-quality stream on their websites, offering podcasts (and the ability to “time-shift” content) to listeners, and making their content available on different platforms.

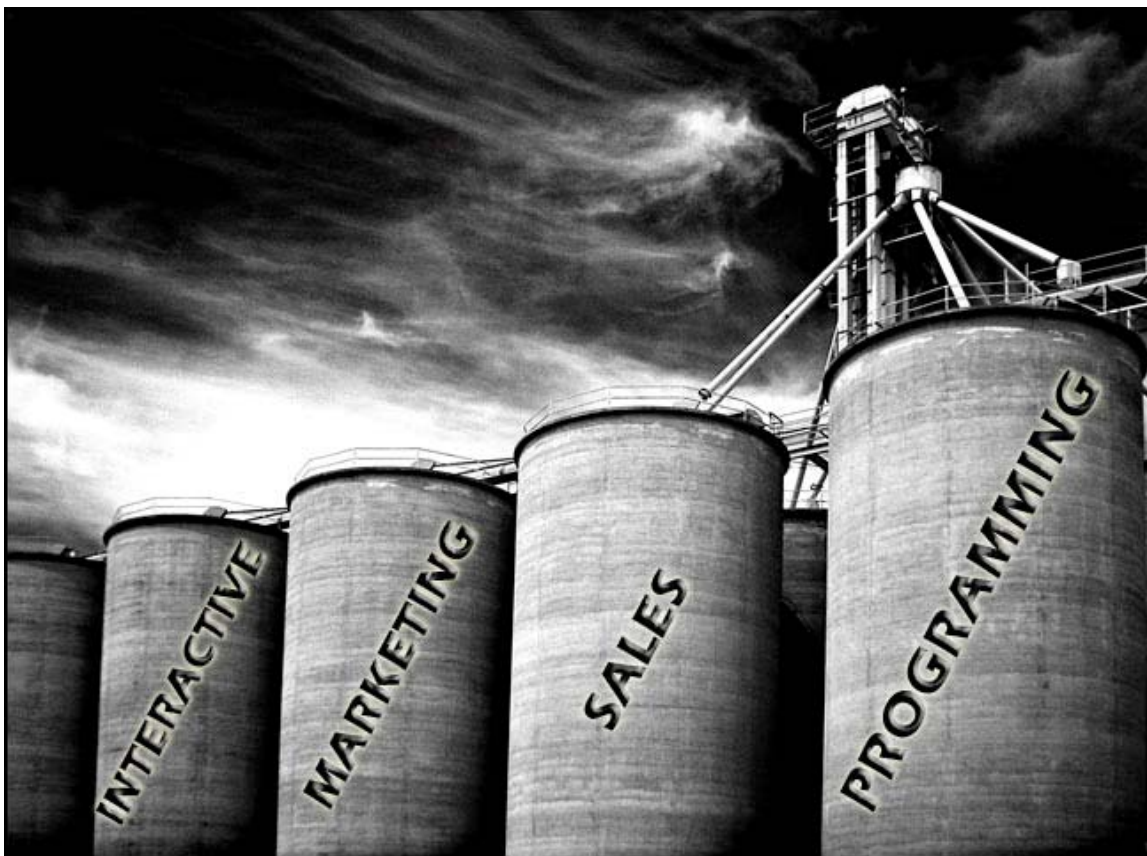
Our company has recently come up with a nifty iPhone application that allows stations to inexpensively have their own logo icon right on the device’s desktop – alongside Pandora, YouTube, iTunes, and the other apps that make the iPhone

the hot must-have handheld phone. This type of app democratizes these devices, and allows broadcast radio to inexpensively buy some prime digital “beachfront property” in a listening location where we haven’t been available.

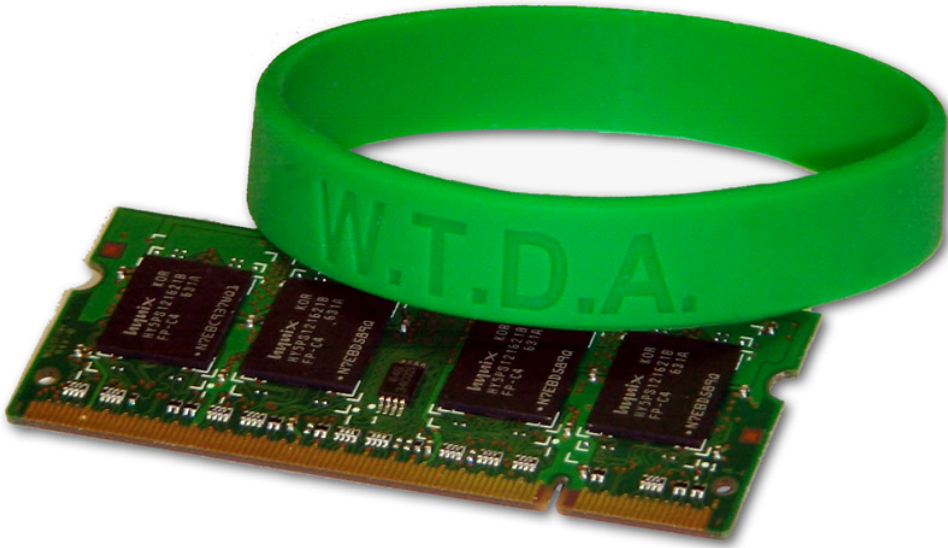
Each year, we conduct a nationwide “Technology Poll” using our clients’ e-mail databases as the sample frame. The 2008 survey was comprised of more than 27,000 interviews culled from 69 participating stations. When you consider that these respondents are core radio listeners, some of the findings are staggering:

- ◆ **Nearly three in ten now report they are listening to AM/FM radio less or a lot less at home.**
- ◆ **More than 95% have access to a high-speed Internet connection.**
- ◆ **About 95% have a cell phone, and of these, seven in ten text regularly.**
- ◆ **Nearly six in ten now own an iPod or a similar device.**
- ◆ **Four in ten have a TiVo or DVR.**
- ◆ **Over half regularly visit social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Classmates.com.**
- ◆ **More than four in ten have played *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* in the past year.**
- ◆ **Nearly one-fourth have participated in a fantasy league in the past year or so.**
- ◆ **More than two-thirds download/stream videos from sites like YouTube frequently/occasionally.**
- ◆ **Nearly half shop online each month.**

Digital has to stop being an afterthought at every meeting. Instead, part of our W.T.D.A. focus is recommending that stations move away from “silo meetings” where the sales staff meets by itself, while programmers and talent have their own get-togethers. The digital solution is to bring the different departments in stations together to work on strategies as a group, devising ways that each group can contribute new solutions to the greater entity.



It's hard to break old habits. But break them we must, because the worlds of advertising and media are careening, and radio must adapt. To that end, we came up with W.T.D.A. bracelets for our clients. Like the string around your finger, it is a tangible reminder that in every meeting, in every strategic session, and in every research review, it is important to ask "What's the digital application?"



If you'd like some for your staff, email me at fredjacobs@jacobsmedia.com