

## the right pitch

## Big radio killed the radio star

by Gabriel Ng

A **CRYPTIC** banner ad appeared recently on a popular online local news website, asking viewers whether they were “sick of Malaysian radio”.

A click on the ad led to an online survey which posted various options on why one might be sick of Malaysian radio, including “too many phone-in contests”, “playing the same music over and over” or “an unduly high interest in Hollywood gossip”.

Whoever the “perpetrators” of this ad and survey are, and whatever good they might get out of it, I wish them all the best.

For me, being three years into my thirties, I am no longer sure whether my musical tastes have changed over time due to the state of Malaysian radio or my own internal, autonomous “evolution”.

Because, in truth, I can't listen to any English radio station here in Malaysia for more than 10 minutes before switching to the soothing sounds of my in-car MP3 player (unless, of course, I need traffic information delivered to me via the sexy, husky voice of Priscilla Patrick).

To some extent, I'm not blaming anyone for this. Musically speaking, its tough being in one's thirties. You can't let go of the character-defining music of your teens and early twenties, yet you

want to stay connected to the popular music of the day (even though most of it makes you cringe or gag) because of the need to be relevant and feel “young”.

But seriously, there is something about Malaysian radio which makes this dislocation harder to bear.

For the youth-oriented stations, the Malaysian predilection for R&B, hip hop and rap – so evident on all our competing stations – leaves me a bit cold, not because I don't like the genres, but because their best forms would have, well, zero chance of ever getting any airplay (how many times have YOU heard Dr Dre on Malaysian radio?).

Usually what gets played is the crowd-friendly bleah variety. The same goes for pop and rock.

For the older listener-oriented stations, their idea of musical variety does not mean different musical styles and sub-genres, but rather 20 years of bubblegum pop. I mean, seriously, how many times do I need to hear the Backstreet Boys, Jon Secada and Rick Astley in a year?

Funnily enough, my flight from this bubblegum land has found me in strange waters. Lately, its been classical music for me, especially since the birth of our baby girl. Unfortunately, Astro's Opus only works at home (you need a decoder), which is fine for baby, but there'll be no in-car classical music for me unless I happen to be in Johor and get it

beamed from Singapore.

In fact, whenever I am back there, I switch between three Singaporean stations: the aforementioned Symphony 92.4, the BBC's World Service and the irreverent non-state owned 91.5FM.

On the drive back home to KL, when the signals of these three stations start to fade into static (somewhere around Pagoh), I actually feel rather like I am leaving civilisation.

The point I am trying to make is not that radio stations should cater to my whims and fancies (although that would be nice), but to make the point that I am only a small instance of a larger trend, that this is a new era of fragmented demographic, cultural and social groups manifesting themselves in even more fragmented musical and programming tastes; an era where most people's iPod playlists are longer than a radio station's;

an era where more new music can be found on the internet than on the radio; an era where I believe niches are getting smaller and smaller, and therefore, Big Radio should be getting smaller and smaller.

So, let me provide not just one business model for a new radio station, but three, all centred on the Klang Valley, given its distinct demographic difference from the rest of the country.

## » Free-to-air classical music station

**Target demographic:** arts lovers, highbrow types, retirees, M2H residents, LiteFM listeners, babies.

**Programming:** opera, classical, contemporary vocals.

**Advertiser shortlist:** Contemporary arts events, baby products.

## » Expat radio

**Demographic:** the Klang Valley expat community and the more liberal English-speaking local population.

**Programming:** call-in programmes (expats need to vent sometimes and complain about their host country), and whatever musical tastes they have (say, Keith

Urban for the Aussies and David Hasselhoff for the Germans ... I'm kidding, ok?).

**Advertiser shortlist:** just pick up a copy of *Expat* magazine. Or *The Peak*. Or *Tattler*.

## » Campus radio

**Demographic:** local, international and foreign students in the Klang Valley.

**Programming:** college or local bands, student interest radio-zines, allowing space for free-form expressions by students themselves.

**Advertiser shortlist:** any youth-oriented products and services would apply.

Advertisers and marketers all over the world know that successful marketing is all about focus, focus, focus. It would be great if our media owners – or better yet – the regulators of our media owners appreciated this fact.

*Gabriel Ng is executive director of Grand Hope Marketing, makers of the Grandsolar range of solar products. He can be reached on his blog at [outlie.blogspot.com](http://outlie.blogspot.com)*

## Weber Shandwick appoints senior veep

**GLOBAL** public relations firm Weber Shandwick has appointed Lucy Davies as its Malaysia senior vice president.

Davies (*pix*) brings more than 12 years of agency and in-house experience in both boutique and multinational companies. She most recently managed key stakeholder communications and media relations at The Royal Bank of Scotland.

Davies also has corporate and consumer experience

– lifestyle, health, diet, entertainment, luxury and fast-moving consumer goods.

“Davies' appointment will strengthen our overall value proposition in the market,” Weber Shandwick Malaysia managing director Anne Gabriel said.

“She brings with her a tremendous set of skills and a broad range of experiences that will enhance our client relations while giving our operations a new strategic edge.”



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