

The past months that the grant has been operative have not been without problems. Fortunately, most of these have been of a minor nature. At present, the program is proceeding smoothly and efficiently, and those connected with the project are enthusiastic about all aspects of the program.

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## RADIO IN MISSOURI

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Last June while attending the annual meeting of the AACI in Omaha, I was approached by George Purvis and Gus Albright regarding this presentation. I readily accepted the assignment when I learned that the theme of this program was *How and Why*. Of course it isn't any mystery as to *how* we produce radio shows in Missouri, well at least not to me, but I must confess that I don't divulge all my trade secrets to my bosses . . . after all, a man must have a little job security.

Now as to the *how* of producing radio shows in our field of conservation . . . I'm going to by-pass the mechanical aspects and deal with the techniques we employ. First of all, our present productions are an outgrowth of a plan developed about 14 years ago. Prior to 1949 our department's only venture into the radio media was an occasional guest appearance on an established sports or outdoor show by the Information Chief or one of the administrators. In 1950 the Information Chief, now our Assistant Director, Dan Saults, convinced the administration that we were passing up a very important public relations tool by not employing heavy use of radio. At that particular time, the big freeze by the FCC on TV stations was holding that *medium* from developing, thus radio was enjoying a terrific upswing.

So, having decided to utilize radio on a mass scale, the next step was the method of operation. Again, the universal use of tape had not appeared on the electronics scene, so in order to produce a complete show, it was necessary to make transcriptions and mail them to the various radio stations. This of course would have taken a great deal of equipment, technical know-how or they could have been contracted. In either case it was considerably more costly than our limited budget would allow. So, this idea was immediately dropped. The next alternative considered was live shows. These would be accomplished by our Conservation Agents (perhaps you call 'em game wardens) Field Service Agents or Foresters. Since we have Agents in nearly every county and within easy access of every radio station in the state, this seemed like a sound approach. Of course, it was realized that our Agents were not radio personalities or announcers, but most of them at least had the potential. So, to encourage and get them started, a weekly radio script was to be prepared and mailed to each Agent. These scripts were written as a two-man dialogue featuring a local announcer and the local conservation agent. The announcer of course playing the role of interviewer and our agent answering questions on wildlife and conservation. Naturally, there were some shortcomings to this type production. First of all, only a top professional announcer can read a script and make it sound natural and off the cuff . . . for this is a matter of training and experience. Secondly, anyone who writes a script . . . does it in his own particular style . . . in other words most of us write as we talk. So, the script which I may write fits my vocabulary and mannerisms . . . but not necessarily that of another person. Another disadvantage, is that a script written for use

by 30 or 40 people in as many different localities, can only deal in generalities on a given subject. This of course isn't a complete disadvantage, in that it informs our agent on the over-all picture of the upland game situation or what the prospects are statewide for the deer hunter, etc.

Armed, with this information an agent could inject the local situation as compared to the statewide picture and make not only an interesting but *informative* program.

And . . . this is exactly how we overcame those shortcomings. Our Agents were instructed to use the script as a crutch only. In other words, they were to take the script . . . rewrite and adapt it to their particular district. But, this wasn't all . . . we went a step further . . . we told our men to completely forget the script, write their own, ad-lib or any combination they wished to do. Now, this may seem like a bold and radical step . . . in fact, some of our counterpart organizations in our own and other states were a little shocked that we would put such a procedure into effect. After all, *they said*, our men might get on the air and say the wrong things and have our department continually swimming in hot water. But, we had the answer to this . . . for we take pride in selecting intelligent, well-educated and very capable men to fill the uniform of Conservation Agent. In fact, many of these men hold college degrees in wildlife management. Thus, we were in effect making public relations men out of them as well as catfish cops. Actually, most were enthusiastic and filled with pride that the department placed enough trust in their intelligence and judgment to give them this free hand. Even so . . . there were many who had never before faced a microphone and though they could face an audience and speak intelligently on any phase of our conservation program . . . microphone fright could make them babbling idiots. So, most of them in the beginning relied very heavily on the prepared script and in fact, used it verbatim. But, as I mentioned a moment ago, this was not the goal we were seeking . . . and the agents themselves soon realized that without a great deal of rehearsal prior to going on the air, the formal script was pretty bad. This became very evident to those who were able to tape their shows and listen to themselves. Nothing shakes you up like the sound of your own voice the first time you hear it, the way it sounds to other people. So, the first time some of our agents heard the playback of a program they had just made it sounded something like this . . . first the voice of the announcer: GOOD MORNING EVERYONE. HERE WE ARE AGAIN WITH ANOTHER FIFTEEN MINUTE PROGRAM ABOUT THE OUTDOORS . . . BROUGHT TO YOU BY STATION KWTO . . . THE MISSOURI CONSERVATION COMMISSION AND FEATURING WOODY BLEDSOE, YOUR GREEN COUNTY CONSERVATION AGENT. SO, LET'S TURN THE PROGRAM OVER TO WOODY AND FIND OUT WHAT'S NEW IN CONSERVATION THIS WEEK.

Now . . . the voice of the agent: THANK YOU, ———, AND HELLO, EVERYONE. THIS WEEK I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU ABOUT BIRDS . . . HERE IN MISSOURI, OF COURSE. YOU KNOW, I THINK INTEREST IN BIRDS IS ALMOST UNIVERSAL. BECAUSE THEY'RE ACTIVE, COLORFUL, AND OCCUR . . . ALMOST . . . EVERYWHERE THEY'RE NOTICED MORE THAN ANY OTHER FORM OF WILDLIFE. AND, BECAUSE OF THEIR INTERESTING HABITS AND VALUE TO MAN THEY'RE WIDELY APPRECIATED. I GUESS IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT A LARGER NUMBER OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE MORE INTERESTED IN BIRDS THAN ANY OTHER GROUP OF ANIMALS, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF INSECTS. BUT, LET'S GET AWAY FROM BIRDS FOR JUST A MINUTE.

Within a short while our agents soon learned to handle these scripts in a professional manner and were not only reading them in a pleasing and informative way, but were beginning to ad-lib all over the place. So, instead of sounding like I did a moment ago . . . the script would come out something like this. (Repeat).

So, as our agents became more proficient as radio personalities . . . their programs of course were rising in popularity. Many began to

notice that not only were they doing a public relations job for the department, but they were helping themselves to personally do a better job of enforcing the fish and game laws of our state. Daily in their personal contacts with the public they were recognized by their radio shows even though the people had never met them personally.

But, they felt like they knew them, because they were weekly visitors in their homes via the squawk box. In addition, they were regarded as experts and people were just a little *awed* to meet the person behind the voice that they listened to on their own radio. You know, it's a peculiar thing, but many people regard messages they hear on this Marconi invention as the gospel. Thus, we soon learned and so did our agents that the farmer, sportsman and John Q. Public would sometimes take exception to his radio presentations . . . but more often than not, they would seek him out for advice and inquire for further information concerning a particular subject.

As these shows became more and more successful, it was evident that we at the information and administration level should further promote and prepare our Conservation Agents for this type of public relations work. So, we initiated radio and later TV training into the rookie agent training program.

Nowadays, before an agent is assigned, he receives several hours of training in radio techniques. He actually practices, using a script and ad-libbing on a tape recorder, listening to his own voice and gaining some experience. Also, during this training period, he is assigned week-end duties under the guidance of a veteran agent. Since many of these agents are doing weekly radio shows, they initiate the rookie by actually putting him on the air as a guest. Thus, by the time an agent is ultimately assigned to full-time duty in the field, he is fairly well equipped to take on a regular radio program in addition to his regular duties.

Of course we have improved and changed our procedure somewhat from our original plan. About five years ago we discontinued the dialogue type script which I demonstrated. We still send out a weekly radio material script which is actually a fact sheet, or perhaps better described as a short feature article on a particular subject. These are only about five minutes in length and again it's left up to the discretion of the individual agent as to how he uses it. Occasionally, we send a prepared tape from the central office which the agent is instructed to incorporate into his show. These of course are specialties covering a certain project or sweeping regulation change or something pertaining to department policy.

Now one thing I haven't mentioned is how we obtained time on the various radio stations. Here again the responsibility was dumped in the lap of the Conservation Agent. He contacted the general manager of his local radio station and outlined the type of program he had in mind. In almost every case the stations were eager to air shows of local interest, featuring local talent . . . particularly when no cost was involved. Being a service organization, we generally rely on public service time, however, we do permit these programs to be sponsored provided a standard disclaimer is used.

Incidentally, if I may digress just a bit . . . I'd like to talk for a minute about public service time. You know, I've heard the statement made at meetings such as this by some I & E person, to the effect that we as conservation organizations could demand more public service time than we are getting since stations are required to allocate a certain percentage of their time in the public interest. Now, this sort of statement always *churns up my ulcer* because it's very misleading. Actually, FCC regulations concerning public service is not as rigid as some seem to think. When a radio station makes application to the FCC for a license to operate, their only requirement is to show on that application how much time will be devoted to public service. In turn the FCC periodically checks their logs to determine if they are complying with the terms of their application. If they aren't they could have their license revoked. However, this rarely happens since public service constitutes a multitude of things. For instance, each time the radio announcer informs you that the time is 12:45 and temperature

85°, this is public service. So are weather reports, news broadcasts, stock market reports . . . well I think you get the picture.

The point is . . . the only commodity that radio stations have to sell is time . . . so if we are to command *good public service time* . . . then we must produce *good shows*.

In Missouri we think we have accomplished this. At present we have more than 30 conservation agents doing weekly radio shows. Most of them are aired in prime time slots, and the greater percentage are public service features.

Radio broadcasting has become a very localized business, and contrary to what was feared when television began developing rapidly . . . radio today is the fastest and most complete means of communicating to the masses. Thus, we encourage our agents to keep their programs as local as possible. In our training classes, conferences and personal contacts with the man on the job, we emphasize the importance of using local names, places, and most importantly—people. Nothing can enhance a radio show more than using a local sportsman, farmer, businessman (and that could very well be the same person) as a guest on a radio show.

To give you an indication of how radio has changed and grown . . . just ten years ago, there were about fifty radio stations on the air in Missouri . . . today there are ninety-two . . . and, gentlemen, they're all making money. But they are doing it with local programming, and we feel that we're helping them as well as our own cause by keeping our programs local.

Well, I've explained generally how and why we produce one particular type of radio program. But this is not the extent of our use of radio by any means. From 1942 until 1953 yours truly was attached to the forestry division as a Forest Assistant . . . which is a glorified title for fire-fighter. Incidentally, under our commission set-up we are charged with management of fish, game and forestry. So, our forestry program is an integral part of the over-all conservation movement. And, one of our greatest conservation problems is forest fire control.

To combat this problem we had set up fire protection districts, lookout towers and were building up a force of manpower and equipment to suppress uncontrolled woods fires. In addition we launched an extensive prevention campaign. One of our tools we employed in informing and educating the hill-people about the folly of setting woods fires, was a panel truck equipped with a gasoline-driven 110-volt generator, 16 mm film projector and a library of fire prevention films. This was scheduled by district foresters in every backwoods store, rural school, church, or just any place where we could gather a crowd. You see, until the last ten years, a great portion of our Ozark country had not been reached by REA, so this unit (which we fondly called the "Showboat") was designed to reach the people who were 99 percent to blame for most of the fire problem.

It was in those years that I was assigned as skipper of the showboat. It was also during those years that a new program idea was born. You see, I would often set up for a showing and then wait for an hour or so while the crowd gathered. So, in order to keep them from getting restless, I thought it would be a good idea to entertain them with music like the big theatres. I approached the boss with this thought and he agreed. In short order I was in possession of a turn-table which hooked directly into the sound portion of the projector. Also, the office was very thorough and in a few days I received by parcel post some very fine transcriptions featuring the great compositions of Strauss, Wagner, Beethoven, and I think even a Toscanini Concert. These would have been well appreciated in an appropriate setting. However, I was scared to use them in "*possum holler*," Missouri. So, I substituted Roy Acuff and the Smoky Mountain Boys. In fact, having been raised in the hills I had learned at an early age to pound out a pretty fair country tune on a *gittar*. So I started carrying one with me and doing my own style of entertaining, interspersed with some rather subtle folksy type fire prevention messages. Well, to make a long story short . . . I decided to try my method in the form

of a radio show. I found some pretty fair country musicians among our foresters and we made a tape . . . a pilot show, so to speak, which was presented to the administration. Fortunately, for me at least . . . they accepted the idea with a great deal of enthusiasm. Thus, was born a program known as "Woody and the Ozark Smoke Eaters." Yours truly in the role of "Woody," with a country music band entertaining and preaching against the evils of forest fires. That's the format . . . we haven't changed much over the past ten years . . . except that nowadays we use professional talent, in fact, headliners in the field of country music appear as my guest on each show. I've had such notables as Red Foley, Leroy Van Dyke, Bobby Lord . . . and the list is long . . . but they all are saying essentially the same thing . . . that is . . . don't set fire to the woods.

How successful has the program been? . . . Of course we have no way of actually measuring its effectiveness . . . but I'm confident we have prevented a number of woods fires . . . also . . . the various radio stations where they are placed take them eagerly and actually get a little demanding . . . wanting more shows than we can produce under our present budget. This year . . . we're producing another series using essentially the same format . . . but swinging away from the fire problem and starting to sell upland game habitat restoration and management.

This idea has worked well in Missouri . . . it might not work in your state . . . but there is one basic fundamental involved that all of you should consider when you produce any radio show. Bear in mind that even though your product . . . conservation . . . is an intangible one . . . your main objective or the why of the show is to sell that product. In this day and age . . . by whatever media you use . . . radio . . . television . . . newspapers . . . you have to be entertaining to attract public attention. The old adage that if you build a better mousetrap the public will beat a path to your door just doesn't hold true in this fast-paced age in which we live. So . . . if you're in the business of selling conservation . . . don't be afraid to get away from the old stodgy type interview radio shows . . . entertain em' . . . inform em' . . . and maybe you'll have as good a success as we are enjoying in the show-me state.

Now, I've heard the argument that we as conservation agencies are not in the entertainment business, and therefore should confine our radio programs to highly informative interview-type shows. This is fine for those who want to restrict their audience to eggheads and other people in the conservation field. For the average listener will generally twist the knob to some other station when this type show comes on the air. In fact, that's one thing we must always bear in mind—our programs have to be good enough to withstand the pressure of a thumb and forefinger on the on-off switch.

Another use of radio that we employ very heavily in Missouri, is the beeper-phone broadcasts. During the heavy fishing season—April through September—we gather a weekly report of fishing conditions and success. This report is compiled each Thursday morning and sent to the wire services. Then in the afternoon we have set up a schedule of radio stations that call me direct and I make a two- to five-minute broadcast of fishing conditions—again to emphasize the local angle—I tailor each broadcast to the primary listening area of the individual station and in fact use their call letters to personalize it to the particular station. This past season we had 12 stations receiving this service and could have taken on more and we do plan to expand next year. I might add that a well-known personality—Art Mercier—on WBBM Chicago, picked up one of these broadcasts over a St. Louis Station and called me personally requesting the same service, of course we were happy to comply.

Well, that's briefly how and why we use radio in Missouri. I realize that I've left out some things you might like to know—so I'd be happy now to answer any questions you may have.