

'Mystery Theater' vanishes, reappears?

Consolidation killed the radio star, according to longtime radio-drama producer Himan Brown. The last episode of Brown's *Mystery Theater*, which is distributed by CBS Radio-managed Westwood One Inc., was to air last Friday (Nov. 27).

Under consolidation, which took off in 1996, commercial radio stations are pressured by their group owners to make more money—i.e., run more ads per hour, Brown says. That means stations weren't interested in his hour-long show, which was offered in 14-minute segments broken only by four sets of two-minute ads (another two-minute set runs at the top of the hour). Stations would prefer to run 15 or 18 or even 21 minutes of ads an hour, he contends.

But "I can't do a drama and break it up in 16 pieces," says Brown, who is responsible for such radio classics as *Dick Tracy* and *Terry and the Pirates* and who produced *The Adventures of the Thin Man*. Besides, "radio should have something more than ... the Howard Sterns and [Don] Imuses," he says.

Mystery Theater, which ran for 10 years in its first go-round, attracted 350 stations at its peak in the 1970s, says Ed Salamon, president of programming for Westwood One. But the new version, which went on the air six months ago after a 14-year hiatus, could find only about 50 station customers. That's not enough to support it to company shareholders, Salamon says.

"We were glad for the association. *Mystery Theater* is the highest-quality radio drama ever produced" and its listeners rave about it, Salamon says. But "radio is so competitive that stations are much choosier in what they'll give up their ad time for," he says.

Westwood One's relaunch of *Mystery Theater* on May 23 was inspired by numerous e-mail requests. Six episodes were made available over CBS's Website about a year ago and the response was "smasharoo," according to Brown: 250,000 e-mails begging for more.

Radio drama deserves a home, Brown says, and he is determined to find it—this time on public radio. He says he has an agreement with WNYC(AM) New York to air *Mystery Theater* five days a week starting at the end of January 1999. A station spokeswoman confirmed that discussions are underway but added, "It's really premature to discuss it at this point."

Brown says he will fund the show on public radio himself. "I want the spoken word to live," he says.



Hi Brown directing 'Mystery Theater' in 1988.

Radio looks at targeting life-in-fluxers

By John Merli, B&C correspondent

Know anyone whose life is in flux? Just married? Buying a home? Changing careers or divorcing? Marketers want their business in a big way, according to a new study by Interop Research based on Simmons spring 1998 data. Consumers going through major life changes are prime targets for advertisers, and the report finds that the strongest media advantage "may go to radio, specialty magazines and cable TV."

Life in flux "creates a new set of wants and needs for a consumer," says study author Michele Skettino. "When a person is actively in the buying cycle, especially if they have never been in a given market before, the opportunity for advertisers to influence their purchasing decision is the greatest."

The report lists specific potential markets based on seven life-changing experiences. Divorce, for example, nearly always creates marketing opportunities for legal services, furniture, phone products and services, pain relievers and sleeping aids, dating services and real estate assistance. The arrival of a new baby usually prompts consumers to seek services for mortgages, health insurance, cameras, detergents, baby products, toys and (like divorce) pain relievers.

Other life-in-flux stages in the study include marriage, buying a home, changing careers, becoming a grandparent and retirement. Bolstering the value of radio as the prime medium for reaching these special target audiences, Interop cites Simmons research showing the percentage of these groups reached weekly as listeners: marriage (85%), job change (84%), new baby (82%), new home (81%), divorce (80%), new grandchild (74%) and retirement (66%).

The study also indexes the groups according to their use of media (with radio usually indexing the highest) and compares the groups' appeal to various radio formats. ■

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