

CONTENT SAMPLING REPORT

Station : Century 105 (North-West England)

Dates Sampled: 28, 29, 31 March and 1 April 2007

Content Sampling Finding

The 'challenging speech' obligation within the Format is one of the key requirements that serves to differentiate Century's output from other, more mainstream, music-led services.

The definition of 'challenging speech' has always been drawn to create as wide a possible field of delivery – in recognition of the fact that there are many different ways of creating a station that stands apart from more music-led offerings. A 'Yellow card' was issued to a previous owner, when it was ruled the station was not offering enough output that fell within the definition. Our report concludes the station has now chosen to deliver its challenging speech mainly through news, news discussion, entertainment (general knowledge quizzes etc) and sport-led phone-ins. It was felt this approach and weight of relevant challenging material, while just meeting the Format, left no room for complacency with regard to the required levels of delivery.

While we noted that some hours were music led, over daytime as a whole, speech accounted for not less than a third, as required by the Format. Challenging speech was delivered through the extended news bulletins and topical stories that emanated from them. These topics were further explored during regular programming together with items that were more entertainment focused. The requirement for three hours of daily weekday phone-ins was in evidence.

The music mix covered a wide range of artists that reflected the adult contemporary, easy listening and soul/motown characteristic that the Format requires.

The station broadcasts the following networked material: High School Days (Fridays 7pm – 10pm); Disco Divas (Saturdays 6pm-10pm) and The A-List (Sundays 4pm-7pm)

The station's public file, available on its website, provides clear information about its locally produced and presented programmes, together with information about its news provision.

This station is operating within its Format

Station Character of Service:

A FULL-SERVICE TALK AND MUSIC STATION WITH 24-HOUR NEWS FOR THE NORTH WEST REGION, TARGETING PRIMARILY 25-54 YEAR-OLDS.

Station Format Detail:

Speech is a very important part of this regional service, and should be challenging as well as reflecting what is happening in the region. For instance, there will be at least three hours of daily weekday phone-ins and some Saturday sport as appropriate. Speech will usually fall between not less than a third and a half of the daytime output with weekends and non-daytime not less than a fifth.

There will be 24 hour news bulletins, and at least during peak-time these will each be at least three minutes long. They will include local/regional news from at least 0600 to 2200 weekday and peak-time weekends, and there will be regular daily sport bulletins.

Music can be up to 50% adult contemporary, with the remainder made up from a mix of modern easy listening, classic easy listening and Soul/Motown. Specialist music which complements the main mix may be broadcast outside daytime.

Format Obligations: Pre-sampling observations

Century 105 began broadcasting on 8 September 1998 and provides a regional North-West service. The 'challenging speech' aspect of the Format is one of the key requirements that serve to differentiate the station's output from other more mainstream music-led services. There is also an obligation to provide three hours of daily weekday phone-ins. The music delivery should not rely on current chart success, but a mix of adult contemporary, modern easy listening, classic easy listening and Soul/Motown.

News provision is 24 hours and should incorporate a local/regional service from 0600-2200 weekdays and peak time at weekends. There should also be regular daily sport bulletins

Localness and General Format Findings (excluding news)

The level of speech varied considerably during individual hours. Most speech was concentrated at breakfast and afternoon drivetime sequences, with some hours being music intensive. The extended news bulletins at 1pm and 5pm (15 minutes) ensured that, overall, the daytime speech requirement for 'not less than a third' was achieved.

The breakfast show speech items were largely entertainment based. Competition phone-in participation features - *'My Generation'* and the *'Golden Hour'* relied on topical, entertainment based questions. The live broadcast from 'Disneyland Paris' on the 29 March acknowledged that the theme park was celebrating its 15 year anniversary and included banter about air travel; driving on the right; meeting visitors from Liverpool as well as a competition item to win a family holiday.

Also within the breakfast sequence was *'Tomorrow's Chip Paper'* - a feature that examined news stories of the day. While it did include entertainment items, it also reported on topical news items from within the station's area. For example a proposed initiative to computerise registers at schools to alert parents by text to unauthorised absences, and the issue of whether a super casino should be sited in Manchester or Blackpool. There were also regular weather updates and *'Eye Witness'* travel reports.

Entertainment news focused on the new series of *'The Apprentice'*; Heather Mills's appearance on American television and P Diddy's proposed British concert tour.

'Century Life' programmed at various junctions throughout the day featured details about the 'Genesis Appeal', which is a charity dedicated to preventing breast cancer.

During this two weekday sampling period, two stories that dominated bulletins was the upcoming vote in the House of Lords on the proposal for a super casino and the subsequent coverage of the result the following day. The mid-morning programme, on the day voting was scheduled to take place, contained a short feature explaining in more detail why there was to be a vote by peers and what the outcome of the vote could mean. There was also a 'Century Poll Vote' on whether listeners favoured Manchester or Blackpool to site such a venture.

The 'Legends' phone-in (6pm -7pm) concentrated largely on England's performance against Andorra and the 'Umberto – phone-in' (10pm – 1am) discussed various topics, such as the male-mid-life crisis; risk from tattoos to the under 18s; should women with children go into the forces, and is there too much fuss made about the food we eat.

Weekend programming with regard to news and speech items was in line with the Format obligations. 'Soccer Saturday' provided match commentary on the Manchester United versus Blackburn game.

News

The station provides a 24 hour news service. Bulletins incorporating local/regional as well as international and national stories are broadcast from 0600-2200 weekdays and peak time at weekends. There is also a headline service between 6am and 9am. The duration of bulletins were generally 3 minutes, with extended bulletins at 1pm 'Century Today' and 5pm 'Century Tonight' (approximately 15 minutes) which explored a range of news stories in more depth. There are also regular sports bulletins.

The two major stories dominating bulletins during this sampling period were the super casino vote in the House of Lords and the subsequent outcome, and the detention of Royal Navy personnel in Iran. One of the detainees was identified as coming from Stockport and a second was thought to be from the Greater Manchester area. This provided a local perspective on major news stories. Other stories from the area included: Man escapes from secure unit and commits rape; Man from Altrincham charged with murder; 22 year old man from Salford jailed for life for murder; Vandals attack Stephen Oates memorial in Cheetham; North West MP proposes measures to avoid another Farepak situation; Two women held at Manchester airport in security scare, and Coronation Street cast member suspended for drunken behaviour. There was also regular Sport and Entertainment news.

Music

Across this sampling period, a mix of tracks that reflected the obligations set out in the Format were in evidence. Artists such as James Morrison; The Feeling; Maroon 5; Scissor Sisters; Robbie Williams; Natasha Bedingfield; Christina Aguilera; Will Young; U2; Ronan Keating; Mariah Carey; Michael Buble; Corrs; Gwen Stefani; All Saints; Doobie Brothers; Eagles; Gallagher & Lyle; Boz Scaggs; Eurthymics; Pet Shop Boys; Lighthouse Family; Duran Duran; Blondie; Bee Gees; Billy Joel; Carole King; Stevie Nicks; Simply Red; Gerry Rafferty; Steve Winwood; Elton John; ABC; Roxy Music; David Gray; Christopher Cross; Supertramp; George Michael and Chris Rea were blended with a mix of soul/motown tracks from Marvin Gaye; Diana Ross; The Temptations; Ike and Tina Turner; Lionel Ritchie; Beverley Knight; Luther Van

Dross; Grover Washington; Earth Wind and Fire; Barry White; Randy Crawford; Fontella Bass; Jackson 5; Evelyn King; Stevie Wonder; Soul II Soul and Sister Sledge.

Notes on Content Sampling

Ofcom's Content Sampling Procedure:

In Ofcom's move of emphasis from input regulation towards output regulation, content sampling has become an important regulatory process. Ofcom has already published the methods to be applied when formally listening to local commercial stations to create a content sampling report. These methods and processes are published at: www.ofcom.org.uk/radio/ifi/contentssampling.

Background Information

Content sampling is a major Ofcom tool in judging the level of station compliance with regard to

- a) Public File*
- b) Localness*
- c) Music*

Content sampling may be carried out as part of an organised process, or may be as the result of a complaint.

Public File

Public File obligations are [to be] enshrined within each station Format. The Public File and/or station website will, in many cases, not only support the findings of content sampling, but signpost monitors to output that enhances specific aspects of localness and music, whether or not it involves the specific days being monitored.

Localness and Music

Localness guidelines are available on Ofcom's website at: www.ofcom.org.uk/radio/ifi/contentssampling/ and station localness and music obligations will vary considerably from Format to Format.