

OFCOM CONTENT SAMPLING REPORT

Station: Ocean FM (South Hampshire)

Dates Sampled: Thursday 18 October, Friday 19 October and Saturday 20 October 2007

CONTENT SAMPLING FINDING

Ocean FM is an Adult Contemporary music and information station targeting 25-44 year-olds in South Hampshire.

Localness is mainly delivered by Ocean through formal news and information bulletins, although there is considerable interactivity with listeners through contests and numerous music-based features. The station comfortably meets its 15% weekday daytime speech minimum, and is over-delivering with regard to the amount of local news bulletins and locally-produced programming it airs.

Musically, however, our three days of monitoring showed the station to be in breach of its Format remit to play predominantly current Adult Contemporary tracks and those from the previous 12 months.

Ocean FM is not operating within its Format and a Yellow Card warning has been issued.

Ocean FM Character of Service

AN ADULT CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND INFORMATION STATION FOR 25-44 YEAR-OLDS IN THE SOUTH HAMPSHIRE AREA.

Ocean FM Format Detail

Music programming will be predominantly (up to 70%) current a/c tracks and those from the previous twelve months, along with a spread of a/c hits from across the years. Specialist music programmes for the target audience (slightly older than Power FM's target) complementing the main music mix may be broadcast in non daytime for up to 30 hours a week.

The station will be music-led, but information and/or features of particular local relevance will be strongly in evidence throughout programming, with bulletins containing local news run hourly at least during weekday peak-time and during weekend breakfast. National news will feature at other times. Speech should account for at least 15% of weekday daytime output.

Format Obligations: Pre-sampling observations

Ocean FM is the heritage local commercial station for the South Hampshire area, which began broadcasting 21 years ago in 1986 as Ocean Sound. It is provided under the same South Hampshire FM licence as its sister station Power FM, which

targets a slightly younger audience with a Contemporary Hit Radio service on 103.1 FM (formerly the 'Ocean Sound West' service).

The station's Format requires it to provide a young-leaning Adult Contemporary (AC) service, with a target audience of 25-44 year-olds and a requirement that music programming must be predominantly current AC tracks and those released in the previous 12 months.

Localness and General Format Findings (excluding news)

As is common with many music-led stations, Ocean's localness is generally delivered – as its Format permits it to be – through information (in regular news, travel, weather and sports bulletins) rather than locally-oriented features.

There was considerable listener interactivity and participation in evidence throughout the output, particularly during Rick Jackson's breakfast show, and there were also numerous opportunities throughout the schedule for listeners to choose their favourite songs or participate in music-based features such as 'Hayling Island Discs', 'Ocean's Rock Gods', 'The People's Playlist', 'Number Ones at One', the 'Top Five Skive at Five', 'Lost in the 80s' and the '9@9 Rewind'.

On the three days we monitored a significant proportion of the presenter links were based around promoting, and taking callers for, 'Rick Jackson's Cash Cow', a high-profile contest the station was running.

'What's On' information generally centred around events that the station had some involvement with, such as a forthcoming fireworks display at Gunwharf Quays in Portsmouth. On the Saturday we monitored, an 'Ocean Thunder' outside broadcast vehicle made the trip to a local industrial estate for the launch of a new local business, although we had some concerns relating to the Ofcom Broadcasting Code regarding the way this piece was executed. These concerns will be taken up directly with station management.

Ocean's Format requires the station to air locally-made output for at least 16 hours per day, and it comfortably exceeds that requirement, with the only networked output on the schedule being Alice Cooper's rock show (Friday and Saturday nights) and 'The A List' chart show on Sunday afternoons. Overnights are presenter-free and automated.

Across the three days monitored, Ocean's 15% minimum speech requirement for weekday daytimes was comfortably met, particularly given the speech-heavy nature of its breakfast show. We also noted the presence on the schedule of a two-hour local sports phone-in on Sunday mornings.

News

On the two weekdays we monitored, locally-produced bulletins mixing local, national and international stories were aired by Ocean on at least an hourly basis between 06.00 and 18:00, including an extended five-minute bulletin at 18.00. This represents an over-delivery of local news provision, which the Format requires only at peaktime. On the Saturday we monitored, the locally-compiled bulletins ran from 07.00 to 14.00. Again, this represents an over-delivery when compared to Ocean's Format, which requires local news to be broadcast only during weekend breakfast.

Examples of local news stories featured during the monitoring period included: a Southampton teacher in court on pornography charges; Winchester loses its title of 'the best place to live in the UK'; local NHS Trusts fail to meet new hygiene standards; police launch search for a 'cat napper' in Southampton; fire closes Winchester school, and; property prices in Hampshire "unaffordable" for first-time buyers.

At other times, externally-produced national and international news bulletins were broadcast at hourly intervals.

Music

Ocean's core music remit, as set out in the Format's Character of Service, is to be an Adult Contemporary station for 25-44 year-olds in South Hampshire. Listening to the station and carrying out analysis of the music logs for the three days, we noted that Ocean is currently interpreting its Adult Contemporary Format in a very Adult Rock type of way, with the inclusion during daytime programming of a high number of classic and alternative/modern rock tracks such as Arctic Monkeys/*Fluorescent Adolescent*; The Jam/*Going Underground*; Lynyrd Skynyrd/*Sweet Home Alabama*; The Cure/*Friday I'm In Love*; The Clash/*Should I Stay Or Should I Go*; The Who/*My Generation*; and The Buzzcocks/*Ever Fallen In Love*. Nevertheless, we recognise that within the context of its Format Ocean could legitimately argue it is providing a more rock-leaning 'Modern AC' or 'Hot AC' type of format often seen in the USA and other commercial radio markets, and we also noted the inclusion of a number of more typical mainstream AC tracks on the playlist such as Robbie Williams/*Angels*; Simply Red/*Fairground*; 10cc/*Dreadlock Holiday*; Take That/*Patience*; Spandau Ballet/*Gold*; Michael Jackson/*Off The Wall*; Anastacia/*Left Outside Alone*; Madonna/*Like A Prayer* and Rod Stewart/*You're In My Heart*.

The Format allows for (but does not require) up to 30 hours per week of specialist music programming, and Ocean provides a 1980s-themed 'Skool Daze' show and Alice Cooper's rock programme, which are both aired on Friday and Saturday nights.

As previously noted, Ocean FM's Format requires that "music programming will be predominantly (up to 70%) current a/c [Adult Contemporary] tracks and those from the previous twelve months, along with a spread of a/c hits from across the years." Ofcom's monitoring of the station across the three days showed that, excluding Alice Cooper's specialist rock show, an average of just 9.5% of the tracks aired by Ocean were either current tracks or tracks drawn from the past 12 months. (This compares to the minimum 51% of current and recurrent tracks that would be required to constitute the "predominant" ingredient of the station's music programming).

We therefore concluded that Ocean is in clear breach of its Format, and a Yellow Card warning has been issued. If we find that these issues have been addressed when we monitor the station again, then the Yellow Card will be lifted.

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 <http://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 enshrined within each station's Licence. 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/rbl/car/localness/ and station localness and music obligations will vary considerably from Format to Format.