

OFCOM CONTENT SAMPLING REPORT

Station: Original 106 (Solent)

Dates sampled: Wednesday 30 January, Thursday 31 January, Friday 1 February 2008

CONTENT SAMPLING FINDING

This full Content Sampling Report was conducted following the issuing of a Yellow Card warning to Original 106 on 8 October 2007, for failure to deliver the music policy set out in its Format. That sample found the station was clearly exceeding the percentage of Top 20 hit singles that its Format permits it to play, particularly during daytime hours. We had also found that an unacceptably high number of the tracks were mainstream pop records that did not sit happily with the station's "Adult Alternative" remit.

At the end of January 2008, we carried out a second three-day analysis of Original's output, and found that, across a 24 hour period, the station was now within its permitted percentage of Top 20 hit singles. There was also a considerable reduction in the number of tracks that could not comfortably be described as "Adult Alternative". The station was within its Format in other aspects of its music policy.

The station was also compliant with its Format regarding news and speech output, which included a high percentage of speech at breakfast, along with interviews and features, and two extended news bulletins.

We concluded that Original 106 is now operating within its Format, and the Yellow Card issued in October 2007 therefore has been lifted.

Original 106 Character of Service

ADULT ALTERNATIVE RADIO – A CREDIBLE MIX OF ADULT-ORIENTATED MUSIC, WITH PARTICULAR APPEAL FOR 40-59 YEAR-OLDS, WITH 24 HOUR LOCAL NEWS

Original 106 Format Detail

Original 106FM is an album-led music service. Songs that are, or have been, in the Top 20 Chart will account for no more than 35% of the station's output.

The service will play predominantly album tracks over the full range of adult-orientated genres including Adult Rock, Adult Soul/R&B/Blues, Adult Mellow and Adult Eclectic from the 60s to today. Every hour of daytime music will include a variety of era and genre, and no single genre or decade will account for more than 35% of songs played. Specialist music programmes that complement the main music mix will be scheduled every weekday evening. (Minimum 10 hrs per week).

Speech is an important part of the output and should include sport, weather, travel, interviews and features. Speech should not make up less than 30% of the station's daytime output, and not less than 40% in breakfast and afternoon drivetime. Bulletins containing local news will be broadcast hourly, 24 hours a day. An extended 15 minute bulletin will be broadcast every weekday in afternoon drivetime.

Format obligations: pre-sampling observations

Original 106, serving the Solent region of southern England which incorporates Portsmouth, Southampton, Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight, was licensed by Ofcom in September 2005 and launched in October 2006. It was notable for being the first ever analogue licence in the UK to be awarded to an Adult Album Alternative format.

Original's Format document requires the Character of Service to be "Adult Alternative Radio" with particular appeal for 40-59 year-olds. The Format's detail states that Original will play "predominately album tracks over the full range of adult-oriented genres including Adult Rock, Adult Soul/R&B/Blues, Adult Mellow and Adult Eclectic from the 60s to today." The album-orientation of the station is further reinforced by a Format requirement that tracks that are, or have been, in the in the UK Top 20 singles chart will account for no more than 35% of the station's music output. There is also a requirement that no single genre or decade must account for more than 35% of the music played on the station.

Following complaints, we conducted a spot content sample on output from September 2007. Our analysis of the music logs showed that Original was consistently playing a higher percentage of Top 20 hits (past and present) than the 35% permitted by its Format. Across the three 24-hour periods monitored in September 2007, the average percentage of Top 20 hits played was 44%, while the percentage was significantly higher during daytime hours (an average of 56% across the three days) and at weekday peaktime (averaging 67%).

We agreed with complainants at that time that a number of tracks being aired by Original were mainstream pop records that did not sit happily with the label "Adult Alternative." Examples of tracks we heard during the three days of monitoring that were considered to be inconsistent with the promised Format included Take That/*Patience*; Duran Duran/*The Reflex*; Clout/*Substitute*; Shalamar/*I Can Make You Feel Good*; Dan Hartman/*Relight My Fire*; Andrew Gold/*Never Let Her Slip Away*; Whitney Houston/*How Will I Know*; Rupert Holmes/*Escape (The Pina Colada Song)*; Maria McKee/*Show Me Heaven*; Junior/*Mama Used To Say*; Tavares/*Don't Take Away the Music*; and Tight Fit/*The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. We commented at the time that this was not to say that Original 106 could not play any of these individual tracks in the future – rather, we were concerned that that the overall proportion of tracks that were considered to be out-of-Format was unacceptably high.

A Yellow Card was therefore issued, along with a statement that this would be followed, in due course, by a full Content Sampling Report monitoring all aspects of the station's output. This is that Content Sampling Report. In addition, we have since received further complaints suggesting that the station continues to operate outside its Format.

Localness and general Format findings (excluding news)

As required by the Format, Original 106's speech output includes interviews and features, which included features on Holocaust Memorial Day events in Portsmouth and fossil hunting on Dorset's Jurassic coast. In particular, the new Tommy Boyd breakfast show also contained significant amounts of speech content in addition to the required sport, weather and travel.

News

The station broadcast hourly bulletins containing local news 24 hours a day, with an extended 15-minute bulletin at 1800, and an additional ten-minute bulletin at 1230. The latter bulletin represents an over-delivery of Original's Format.

Music

Over a 24-hour period, Original 106 was found to be playing between 31 and 34% of songs that were currently or had ever been in the Top 20, and was therefore now complying with its Format requirement. While it was noted that Top 20 hits still comprised the majority of songs in some hours, particularly during daytime, the Format does not place any restriction on the number of Top 20 hits aired within a specific hour.

We found that the station played the required adult-oriented genres including Adult Rock (such as The Clash, Daughtry), Adult Soul/RnB/Blues (Brand New Heavies, Doobie Brothers), Adult Mellow (Jack Johnson, Finlay Quaye) and Adult Eclectic (Goldfrapp, 10,000 Maniacs). The number of songs aired that we felt did not sit comfortably with the station's core "Adult Alternative" Character of Service was noted to have considerably decreased, although a handful were still in evidence.

Tracks from the 60s and 70s were aired, and there was a variety of era within every hour, but Original 106's music is predominantly from the 80s, 90s and 2000s. In particular, we noted that the level of music from 2000 to today was at the cap of 35% across a 24 hour period, and have raised our concerns about this with the station, particularly given the stated target audience (in the Format's Character of Service) is 40-59 year-olds.

A two-hour specialist music feature, such as *"The Album A to Z"* and *"40 Not Out"*, was broadcast each weekday evening between 2200 and 0000, and complemented the main music mix.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we recognise the unique musical demands of the Original 106 Format, and the clear move the station has made with regard to its output and compliance to that Format. Adherence to those demands is vital to the provision of a radio landscape in the Solent area that provides real choice for the listener, and we would expect the station to continue its evolution to see it sit even more comfortably within its Format.

Original 106 is now operating within its Format and the Yellow Card issued in October 2007 has been removed.

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.