

Belfast independent local radio licence applications

Questions and responses: U105

These are the responses received from U105 to the non-confidential questions asked by Ofcom regarding the group's application for the Belfast licence.

1. Please define the phrase “interactive widescreen radio” (p.46) and specify how this would be interpreted in practice.

We do not underestimate the challenge involved in attracting additional audience to local commercial radio from those aged 45 and over, for whom BBC Radio Ulster is predominantly the station of choice at present. Our research, and the strong market share enjoyed by BBC Radio Ulster, confirm that this audience responds very positively to a comprehensive and varied speech and music service, provided by those with a proven understanding of the nuances of the area and its people.

The phrase “interactive widescreen radio” was devised to encapsulate both the context and content of the U105 proposition.

Taking first the context, we propose to harness convergence to provide effective competition for the BBC in Belfast which uses its multi-platform status to support radio. Indeed they are currently running a heavyweight TV campaign promoting all three media with the strap line ‘BBC Northern Ireland – what life is’.

However, the BBC has been criticised by the Commercial sector for abusing its position with regard to cross-promotion, so we are extremely mindful of the need to be fair and transparent with our proposals.

In practice, television commercial airtime will be used for on-screen promotion of U105, and radio commercial airtime for the promotion of UTV. There will be no cross-referencing within programming, other than the standard acknowledgement that would be given to establish the credentials of an interviewee. For example, Cool FM is credited when one of their presenters appears on UTV each week.

The U105 News and Programming team will have access to television resources - to UTV's correspondents in the fields of politics, sport, business and the environment; to material gathered by news reporters; and to guests coming to participate in programmes. U105 will also be able to make use of the extensive UTV archive dating from the early 1960's with sound clips featured during oldies-based segments.

Through UTV Internet, we have the in house expertise to provide a comprehensive and constantly updated website which augments U105 programming, and a ‘Listen Again’ facility to allow issue and advice-based

output to be accessed later, as well as being linked by keyword to any similar content on the main UTV website. The U105 site will also carry useful links to organisations – business, community and others - mentioned during programmes.

Secondly, considering content; U105's proposed output is designed to engage the audience, with ongoing opportunities for interactive participation – by phone, e-mail, and text - across different programmes, but most specifically in mid morning where the hot topics of the day will be debated.

Here, "widescreen" refers to the breadth of the service, where in music the daytime range will offer consistently melodic tracks and significantly more from earlier eras than existing local commercial stations, with specialist genres such as Nostalgia, Modern Jazz, Homegrown Irish, Rock, Country, R&B and Soul in the evenings.

In speech, it refers to the spread of news, sport, weather, travel, topical discussion, advice slots, guest interviews, and arts, business and community coverage, amounting to over 26 hours of the spoken word in daytime each week.

In summary, the phrase "Interactive widescreen radio" therefore reflects the way in which the converged resources of the UTV Group would enable U105 to compete effectively with a similarly resourced BBC Radio Ulster to maximise the potential additional audience for local commercial radio.