

Edinburgh independent local radio licence applications

Questions and responses: Forth3

These are the responses from Forth3 to the non-confidential questions asked by Ofcom regarding the group's application for the Edinburgh licence.

1. How did you identify a gap in the market on which to base your target audience definition and proposed format?

Through Radio Forth we have experience of broadcasting to Edinburgh and East Central Scotland for over thirty years. While Forth and other commercial services provide significant news and travel information, it is by nature limited in that the information sits within a music format. Our knowledge and understanding of the area suggested to us that a commercial speech service was a missing ingredient in the radio spectrum currently on offer to listeners in the advertised market.

We further felt that, in this era of devolution for the Nations, Scotland's capital city, the home of the Parliament and business (Edinburgh is the second financial centre in the UK), deserved its own voice: a speech station based in the city. It should be noted that the only current Scottish speech station is the BBC's Radio Scotland, and that is actually based in Glasgow.

As we also comment in our answer to your question 3, we initially constructed a format appealing to an older, higher socio-economic grouping, but in initial focus groups found that the appeal of a speech station would be much wider. On that basis we adjusted our proposition, and it was this new format that we finally researched, as shown in our application (page 7, Appendix 3 – MRUK Qual Findings Aug 04): "There are no talk-based stations with an East Coast slant at the moment." (Female 45-60 years C1)

2. How did you use the results of the survey to feed in to your audience projections?

Having constructed a format that researched well, in providing a widely welcomed speech service, we reviewed a large number of radio markets across the UK to see how similar formats researched in terms of reach and hours. In the absence of any commercial speech-based stations we had to use as our base local BBC services, although we were also able to interrogate the LBC audience in the London area.

In comparison to the many markets we reviewed, we projected a modest reach (15%) and even more conservative average hours (8); the latter because we recognise, confirmed by research (page 21, Appendix 3 - MRUK Qual Findings Aug 04), that any listening to a news service is likely to be in addition to existing music stations.

In our opinion, our projected total hours are relatively low, particularly on the basis that no local Edinburgh / east central Scotland speech based news and information station currently exists, either from the BBC or commercially.

3. What was the reason you decided to only interview ABC1's in your focus groups when you say that the station's format is designed to have broad appeal to those over the age of 35?

As already described in our answer to your question 1, we initially felt that a speech based service with a strong news, politics and business agenda would appeal primarily to an ABC1 demographic. During the first research stage in focus groups, it became apparent that a slightly 'lighter touch' delivery would have wider appeal in both age and socio-economic groupings.

Inclusion of lifestyle and more general features (as described in our application) appealed increasingly to women, thus providing a more balanced potential delivery (we anticipate a near 50/50 male/female split in listening hours), together with the wider demographic appeal that we researched in our second research project.

4. Please confirm which functions will be shared with Forth 1 and 2, if any?

As it is our intention to base the operation within the existing Radio Forth premises there will be a number of shared resources and facilities, both at a local and at a group level, that can be incorporated.

The local Sales, Sponsorship and Promotions teams, in addition to Engineering, will be locally shared functions, though we will enlarge both departments with additional staff.

IT, Health & Safety and HRD are already group resources provided by SRH, and Forth 3 will be supported by these facilities.

While Forth currently employs a number of journalists who will contribute to the news service, we intend to significantly expand our journalistic resource, as described in our application (page 16, Application).

The editorial content and programme judgement for Forth 3 will be the sole responsibility of the Managing Editor.

The Managing Director of Forth 1 and Forth 2 will assume a supporting role to the Forth 3 service, and will maintain overall control of expenditure, staff relations and the locally shared functions as described above.

Forth 3 will also have the ability to draw on the input of all the SRH stations across Scotland to provide unrivalled national coverage to the listeners in

Edinburgh, when relevant. In the same way, stories emanating in Edinburgh can be similarly 'pushed' out to other SRH stations.

5. What is the maximum extent to which you plan to automate programming?

Our qualitative research revealed a strong demand for evening / weekend repeats of those programmes listeners may have missed first time around. It would be our intention to record specific programmes (from time to time) which are initially broadcast as live, to be transmitted in the evening or overnight.

We will, to some degree, have to learn from experience as to the demand for repeats, but it should be further noted that Forth 3 as a news service will have full journalist and broadcast support, in station, 24/7, so that live programming (eg to accommodate breaking news) can be reinstated immediately.

Again, I would ask that, should you require further information, I would be delighted to provide you with same as quickly as possible.