



Radio Sets Sights On Local Online Ad Dollars



By Paul Heine

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ATLANTA --- Digital executives from three of radio's largest owners offered upbeat assessments of radio's opportunity on the exploding online landscape in an opening-day session at the RAB's annual conference here Feb. 11.

Broadcasters are eager to expand their piece of the \$8 billion local online ad pie, the fastest growing segment in the interactive ad market. "I don't know why everyone is so gloomy. I think this is the best opportunity we've ever had," said Emmis Interactive VP of integrated sales Deb Esayian, who moderated the "How to Cross the Digital Divide" session.

Entercom senior VP of digital Sandy Smallens called the Internet "the latest place where we can take our brands to bring them alive," while Mike Aronow, director of sales development for CBS Radio's digital media group, said, "We can't just be in the space. We have to lead."

Andy Lipset, managing partner for Ronning Lipset Radio, an ad agency that specializes in pure-play online broadcasters such as AOL and Yahoo, stressed the importance of getting the most out of longstanding relationships with listeners. "Don't just take your on-air elements and put them online. You need to make them interactive," he said.

Smallens urged attendees to simplify the ad-buying process and learn the lingo digital media buyers use: "If buying your digital assets is more difficult than buying your spots, you have a problem. Learn the language and ways of digital media and attend a conference or two that doesn't have radio in its title."

Give the people what they want, Smallens said, acknowledging that "there is no magic bullet." However, if your PD can't articulate three reasons why P1 listeners would go to your Web site, other than to stream the station or enter a contest, then "you're in trouble," he added. One of the challenges in the digital space, according to Aronow, is educating advertisers on the value of radio's interactive assets. "A few years ago we were in the digital Dark Age," he said. "We didn't get value because there wasn't any."

Since then, radio's digital initiatives have come of age and station sites have changed dramatically, Aronow said, underscoring his point by projecting on an overhead display screen grabs from smart, savvy sites such as that for alternative WXRK (K-Rock)/New York, which offers video on demand, animation, a studio camera and other interactive elements. Station Web sites now have "dynamic, evolving signature content," Aronow said. "PDs are going to be expected to increase Web traffic just as they are expected to improve or maintain ratings."

Lipset said the attraction of Internet radio to ad buyers is that it has the "power of radio combined with the accountability of online metrics." What's more, Web radio is "the soundtrack for online buying and shopping."