**Sydney Focus Group Research**

(Saturday 24 September, 2016)

**BACKGROUND:**

Intermedia International Pty Ltd has been commissioned by the board of Radio for Print Handicapped Australia (RPHA) to conduct a focus group study of the RPH stations in each of the capital cities comprising Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Canberra. Each of the individual stations will receive a report of the focus group study, conducted over a two hour period, by Peter Butler representing Intermedia International Pty Ltd.

5RPH Adelaide was the initial station to conduct the research in early July and Sydney has followed suit in September. Other dates, with the remaining stations, are yet to be determined in order to complete the study as soon as possible. Melbourne has firmed up a date of Saturday October 22 for their focus group.

**METHODOLOGY:**

Twelve participants joined in the discussion concerning the station, 2RPH, Sydney.

The participants were recruited by the station and three of the twelve were blind, while eight were vision impaired and one normal sighted person and a long term listener. The group comprised ten males and two females.

The topics covered during the course of the discussion included listening habits, the mode of listening, the content of the station, the variety of the content, the morning newspaper readings, the religious content, the sport, the magazine readings, general program content, digital radio use and a final unique segment humanising the station’s image. This last segment provides a key insight into the station’s reputation, its credibility and how it is perceived by its listeners.

**OUTCOMES:**

**2RPH** was well received and enjoyed by its listeners and the listeners liked “the personalities and the people reading”. “It’s got a bloody great feel’’ was the response when asked does 2RPH get you involved as a listener. All twelve participants were regular listeners to the station and they felt it was relaxed in its presentation. They liked the station for its information and its wide range of magazine readings, “Ï don’t get to read the magazines any other way”. “I like the idea that there’s specifically a station for we blind people” said one participant and he liked the readings from the variety of magazines like “Spectator” and “New Statesman”.

One lady said she likes to have things read to her that she couldn’t physically hold up to read for herself. “Ï am able to listen to the daily newspapers” was the comment offered and another participant felt the station needs to promote the times of the programs more than they do. This was a common problem in Adelaide’s focus group too.

It was felt the longer newspaper feature articles were good to hear and these were read later in the afternoon or the weekend. This participant also contributed an interesting aspect to consider, as she liked book readings, but only the non-fiction books, because she missed a couple of chapter readings and lost track of the fiction story because of it and “I was left high and dry”.

One gentleman listened to the station at home in the car, at the gym and gardening. Most of the group had the ABC stations as alternative listening, apart from an occasional 2CH listener and one listener to Aljazeera.

**DIGITAL RADIO:**

Most participants listened to 2RPH through their AM radio and three listened on digital radio. As 2RPH has an FM repeater in Sydney, a couple of participants listened via FM. One participant listened online “on my computer”. An interesting comment made by a blind member suggested because digital radio has a screen to read stations, digital radio was of no use to her because she couldn’t see it. “On digital it’s (the signal) loud and clear” was a random comment about digital radio. “I’ve ignored digital radio because I can’t see the screen” was another interesting comment from a blind listener.

**READERS:**

Very good to excellent was an overall comment about the 2RPH readers. “Some of the readers used their tone of voice to express their own opinions of what they are reading” was a comment offered about a couple of the 2RPH readers. “We know you can’t afford to have professional readers and most of the volunteers are a very high standard.” One other comment was they liked the readers on 2RPH because “they have passion”. It was generally felt readers shouldn’t give opinions about articles they read on the air.

**NEWSPAPER READINGS:**

A blind long time listener said that they don’t listen to the breakfast program in the morning as they listen to the ABC breakfast program. “I rarely listen in the mornings, as it’s just the ordinary newspapers” was a further comment from this listener.

One participant said they would like to have political cartoons explained to them as part of the newspaper reading service and felt they were missing out by not having the cartoon of the day explained on air. Readings from the Sydney Morning Herald and the Telegraph were thought to be essential.

Editorials are regarded as very important to read. Reading “Column 8” was also thought to be useful. Local suburban newspaper readings was suggested as a program each week even though it was done in the past. Describing photos from the paper readings was rejected by all at the table.

**MAGAZINES:**

The reading of magazines was a real positive for 2RPH and it “saves me money not having to buy the magazines” was a plus for one long term listener. The diversity of the magazines read by 2RPH was thought to be a very positive aspect of the station. The variety of the magazines was “good value.” “They are the most important part of the station” a blind listener contributed to the discussion. One said that reading magazines was better than the daily newspaper readings.

**DIVERSITY:**

The diversity of the programs was regarded as a positive aspect for 2RPH. Participants felt there was room for more diversity with intellectual, scientific and historic programs, as well as more book readings. Although it was felt there was a lot of repetition of the books and also with the children’s books readings. “RPH should try new things” was a suggestion by a member of the panel.

**GENERAL PROGRAMMING CONTENT:**

The TV Guide programs took up some time in discussion. It was felt that just reading the TV programs didn’t offer enough information to listeners and that TV categories might be a better idea such as documentaries, lifestyle programs, soaps and films or programs which are highlighted by the SMH with a paragraph or two written about them. In other words, a bit more thought into the TV Guide process would be well received.

“A couple of reviews would be very good” was a comment made in summary. “Don’t take away the TV Guide…I rely on it” was a final comment made by a blind participant.

The death notices raised some animated discussion too. A number of the group turn off when they are read at 8.45am, while a blind member said “I don’t listen to them every day…but I do listen on Saturdays because they are pretty comprehensive” Listening for “somebody I know or is well known” was a comment as to why they listen to the death notices. The scheduled time of the death notices was regarded by one as “a hard way to start the morning” and maybe it could be scheduled later in the morning.

It was felt by some that because 2RPH programs on a fortnightly roster, it was hard to keep track of when their favourite programs were on. It was suggested could the station work on a weekly schedule rather than a fortnightly roster of programs.

“The station used to sound old fashioned but its more modern now” was a positive comment made about 2RPH. “I do listen to the things I want to listen to” was a comment from a long term blind listener.

The BCA program “New Horizons” was discussed and it was felt the program should be extended from 15 minutes to 30 minutes to increase the information. However a comment was made “more time is spent on new appointments and international travel than the needs of the vision impaired” “I don’t want to know about the trip to Paris, I want to know what’s gonna happen for me.”

Cooking programs were not regarded as worthwhile but travel programs were considered as acceptable. Music programs and any specialised music shows were regarded as not valid on 2RPH “It’s not a music station” was a comment made by a blind listener. Gardening programs were also rejected because “it is covered on other stations as well.”

Reading children’s books was thought to be of value… but the readers needed to watch their tone of voice and not be condescending to the listeners. One blind listener felt some books chosen to be read were not suitable for young children and the station needed to take care in their choice.

Podcasts were thought to be useful but hardly any of this group used the station’s podcasts. It would appear the station needs to promote the use of podcasts more frequently than they do and to encourage their listeners to listen to podcasts.

**RELIGIOUS PROGRAMS:**

When religious content broadcast on the station was introduced into the discussion, one member of the group considered religious programmes “offensive”. “I value the religious program on Sunday afternoon” offered one blind listener “Once it (religious programs) comes on… I change channels” was another comment made about religious programming.

**SPORT:**

“I would love to have live coverage on sport… like Wimbledon” was suggested by a blind member of the group. Sport took a hit with this group of listeners. It was felt there was enough sport covered on 2RPH and adding any more was too much. The program “Sporting Pages” on Sunday afternoon between 5.00 and 5.30pm was unknown to all members around the table.

**NEWS:**

The concept of taking an hourly news service from the ABC was totally rejected by all at the table. “I think it’s worth thinking about” was offered by one participant but everyone said they weren’t interested. They were happy to turn to the ABC… for ABC news!

**STATION PROMOS:**

Like Adelaide, the lack of station promos identifying programmes and times of broadcast was a concern to the group. “I have no idea what the book readings are… because they don’t tell me” was a comment made by a blind listener. More station promos informing the listeners when the programs are on air is essential for Sydney as well as Adelaide.

**NEW PROGRAM IDEA:**

Talkback and interview programs were favourably discussed “I would put less emphasis on reading from the newspapers and more on interviews and perhaps some particular forms of talkback” said one blind listener. It was felt that “a lack of controversial blind community subjects are not discussed” and international blind issues could be brought up for discussion on 2RPH. “Blind talkback at night where they discuss blind subjects” was suggested by one participant. This same concept was championed in the Adelaide focus group in July.

The NDIS scheme was cited as another reason to get the station involved in interviews and talkback programs. A regular segment for recorded comedy was also suggested for 2RPH programming by a blind contributor. “I think there is scope for the station to go beyond reading newspapers” was also a comment from this same person. A new blindness technology talk back program could work on the station and was certainly “worth a try”

**IMAGE:**

At the end of the session the participants were asked to imagine that if you take the sound of 2RPH, the volunteers, the promos, the programs, the music….everything about the station and put it into a big mixer and out of the mixer comes a person. The idea is to personify the station.

The 2RPH person is a male, aged 60+. He would be welcome to dinner at any of the participant’s home. He could be trusted… “Brian Henderson…the former news reader” was suggested as the person in real life… and he is reliable. He would be regarded as a friend.

**IN CONCLUSION:**

The name Radio for the Print Handicapped was mentioned as being negative and a name like “Reading Radio” was suggested as a new name for the group of stations by the group.

“Keep up to date” was strong advice to 2RPH from one of the members of the group.

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct this research in Sydney, there’s lots to do and lots to look at from this great little group of listeners.

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