

Avoid the audience research echo chamber

and be brave enough to seek wider views

Radio stations seeking to grow their audiences need to step out of the echo chamber of feedback given by their most loyal listeners if they are seeking to expand their listenership and reach.

While loyalists' feedback is valuable, seeking alternate viewpoints and insights from occasional listeners, or even those who don't tune in at all (yet), will add essential context that will set the foundations for business growth, listenership strategy, and content direction.



However, many radio stations in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria are turning to existing loyal audiences when they conduct listener research, with 31% asking a few questions of listeners that phone in for competitions, and some saying that the fact that their station is doing really well is the only feedback they need. Of the stations that responded to the survey, 38% have an in-house team that does audience research, while just 13% have turned to external experts to seek independent insights into programming, presenters, and content.

When embarking on strategies to grow their audiences, 69% turn to advertising and marketing across traditional media and social media platforms, while 19% sponsor events. The remaining respondents trust on-air competitions to inspire audience growth, along with outside live broadcasts.

In Ground Control Research's work across the continent, we've seen time and again that meaningful audience growth can only come from engaging with and understanding a diverse range of consumers within a station's target audience and footprint. Researchers can gather and process meaningful feedback from people who might not be listeners, but who fit the station's profile, whether that's in terms of demographics, content, or location.

Seeking feedback from a measured but diverse range of voices means that loyal listeners' feedback is complemented with that of potential listeners whose feedback could inspire adjustments that will lead to growth and expansion.

That's because very few people listen to only one radio station – many have favourite presenters that they follow across multiple stations, or they choose different types of content depending on the time of day, with their choices influenced by myriad factors as they go about their daily business. Even if they have an emotional connection with one station, they'll dip into others – and it's these listeners' perspectives that are often the most valuable, as they have a broader experience of what's available on the air.

We've also found that consumers participating in surveys feel more comfortable giving honest and sometimes negative feedback to an independent third party. Even the most loyal listener might feel overexposed to some types of content, for example, but they may be reluctant to share this feedback with an in-house researcher.

It takes time, expertise, and infrastructure to identify the best people to interview for the most valuable feedback, and then knowledge and experience to solicit their insights through expertly designed research that is done without brand bias.

External researchers also have the industry experience to find the answers to questions that stations might not even know that they need to ask – again helping reveal insights outside the echo chamber that they may have inadvertently built among their loyal following.

Research findings also achieve the most impact when feedback is translated into actionable insights that can inform programming decisions, line-up planning, and content strategy, and it takes seasoned experts with sophisticated data analytics skills to sift meaningful insights from general chatter.

Engaging with potential listeners yields vast amounts of feedback, and seasoned researchers and data analysts can distil that information into clearly defined trends and patterns that station managers and their teams can use to guide their strategic growth.

It's also important to note that research is never complete – it's an ongoing process that can only support sustained growth if consumer insights are gathered regularly. Completing a round of research and enjoying the growth that comes out of implementing its findings is just one step in the ongoing journey of expanding radio audiences, which in turn boosts advertising spend and profitability.

Ground Control Research surveyed radio stations across three countries to gain insights into stations' approaches to audience research and strategies for growth. For more information about how Ground Control Research uses its technology platforms to engage with and gain valuable insights from target audiences through qualitative and quantitative research, visit www.groundcontrolresearch.co.za

