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Six Tips for Success in Syndication

Starting up a new program or service in syndication is like starting up in many other businesses: A high failure rate. A recent story in Esquire estimated that 90% of all new start-up businesses ultimately fail. In Radio, lots of concepts for syndicated programs and services don't make it. Here six things to think about as you consider embarking into syndication. Following these steps can help improve your odds:

1. **Know your product.** It seems obvious, but it's important to take as objective a look at your project as possible. Since it's your creation, you are naturally passionate about it, but taking a cold hard look can be helpful. Consider the following:

- Is your program unique? If so, what makes it unique?
- Have you been doing your program for a while? If so, are you keeping it fresh? Are you updating bumper music, segment intros and benchmarks, or is it essentially the same show you did 15 years ago?
- Is there a need for your show to exist? If so, what is it? Can you tell someone convincingly in the context of a 30 second elevator pitch?

2. **Know where your audience is.** Be objective about the audience potential. Radio is a mass medium. Is there room for specialty shows? Yes, but think long and hard about whether your specialty show has enough appeal for it to be considered by programmers. A show about butterfly collecting, for example, may work better as a weekly podcast than a weekly radio show.

3. **Understand the marketplace.** Is your show one of many similar shows available to stations? If so, how does yours differ? And is that difference significant enough to lure potential affiliates away from whatever they are presently doing. You will need specific points of difference. "My show is better" is not an adequate response.

4. **Set reasonable goals and expectations.** If you are entering a crowded field, or one dominated by a single program, make sure your expectations are in line with the competitive environment. Similarly, understand that even if your show is substantially better, it may take months for a station to implement the programming change that will create a spot for your show. Contracts, commitments, and HR concerns can delay implementation of your product even if the affiliate loves it. Remember, programmers work on their timetable, not yours.

5. **Talk to the experts—and trust their advice.** One of the great things about this business is how open we are to helping each other. Take advantage of that expertise—even if you don't like the answers. Resist the temptation to surround yourself with "yes people". Even if they have the best intentions, they can slow down your progress.

6. **Know yourself.** Are you ready to make the investment in time and money it will take to deliver the product, acquire affiliates, and maintain affiliates? Can you sustain it for 2-3 years? Are you patient enough to handle a long growth cycle?

The syndication business can be exciting, fun and profitable. Taking the time to get a clear understanding of yourself, your program and the marketplace can make you better prepared for the road ahead.