

Controversial giveaway

It's cash, but it isn't money. The competitors of radio station WAQY-FM are unsure if the station's listeners realize the "Wacky cash" giveaway is play money and not real money.

With the annual ratings period just underway (it began Thursday), the area stations that cater to the rock and youth markets are heavily promoting with contests and free items. Many of the adult-oriented stations also have giveaways geared to the ratings, but they're more low-key.

It's normal for stations to complain that the others are underhanded in their promotions. What's not normal is that one station, WHYN, was so incensed with the WAQY "Wacky cash" giveaway that it filed a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission. Usually the grumbling remains just that.

"I don't think it's clear to the listeners that what they're giving away isn't real money," said WHYN general manager Phil Drumheller, whose office is lined with radios, TVs and mopeds his station is giving away.

WAQY operations manager Jim Rising said, "We checked with counsel and he agreed there was nothing improper about it. We've heard from the FCC, but we don't believe there will be any problem. We make it very clear it is not real money."

Rising said the play money, imprinted with pictures of station disc jockeys, is given away through phone contests and at personal appearances with area merchants. The money is to be collected toward an auction to be held next month at the Springfield

Civic Center, when prizes will be given to bidders holding the largest amounts of the "Wacky cash."

He estimated the top prize, a Pontiac Firebird, will take about \$200,000 in play money to be won.

"When we get a phone caller who wins Wacky cash," Rising said, "we tell them [off the air], 'You realize this isn't real money?' About 90 percent know it already and the rest say, 'That's okay, I'll take it.'"

Rising said, "The other stations are jealous. It's a great promotion."

One competitor, WMAS-FM general manager Zachary Land, agreed. "I wish I had thought of the idea — if it didn't have a funny smell," he said.

The three major rock and disco stations all have several promotions running now. Some are tied to the ratings period and others are year-round. Both WAQY and WMAS are giving away cars. WAQY has a "Rolling boogie machine," a portable music system rented to schools and clubs for dances. WHYN introduced its own and went WAQY one better: it makes some free appearances.

WMAS gives away dinners, gift certificates and theater tickets. WHYN has an "album stash" — all the free albums a listener can name in 10 seconds — as well as free gasoline. WAQY also gives away records. WHYN has a prize van it takes around to area high schools and gives away radios and TVs.

"When we show up for a promotion with a merchant, it's not unusual to have 150 people here at one time," Rising said.

— WILLIAM K. HOWARD



Jim Rising of WAQY

Radio ratings wars

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noted, "You can prove just about anything you want depending on whose ratings you use."

Disco's popularity on radio here is one question that will be answered by the ratings. Discotheques and their music were scorned for years as limited-appeal offerings mainly for gays and blacks. That was before the movie *Saturday Night Fever*. Disco now is estimated to be a \$10 billion-a-year business, including record sales, disco clothes, and nightclub admissions. It's possible to hear even the Rolling Stones and Sinatra doing disco music.

The first disco station in the U.S., WKTU-FM in New York City, appeared last July. By year's end it had knocked off top-40-rock WABC-AM as the nation's most listened-to radio station.

The other local station managers sniff at the thought of WMAS-FM moving up as far and fast as WKTU did, suggesting disco here still has more appeal among blacks and Hispanics than whites, and among whites, primarily among youths from blue-collar families — a roundabout way of saying disco listeners aren't the wealthiest of consumers.

"Disco has shown it's not a passing fad," said WHYN manager Drumheller, "but it may be a fad that disappears by the '80s. Right now, we're playing 40 to 50 percent disco, because that's how much of the top 40 or 50 songs are disco."

"Of all the things WMAS could do to change its format, disco was the only one that could fill a void in the local market," Drumheller said.

WMAS general manager Land said, "The positive reaction was faster than we ever expected to the disco format."

He said, "Disco is upbeat. It's toe-tapping music. It's music you listen to when you want a lift. Disco is for people who want to feel up without smoking pot."

To make sure his listeners are feeling "up" to

the right kind of music, Land has a contract with disco consultant Kent Burkhart, who programmed the format at WKTU in New York.

Once a week, Land said, Burkhart's music director relays her findings of what's popular elsewhere in the country in discotheques, on the two dozen or so all-disco stations, and in record stores.

The two main top-40 rock stations here, WHYN-AM and WAQY, rely on checks with record stores and calls to their request phones to determine what's popular.

What's popular, they feel, is the high-energy sound, a tightly-controlled playlist, contests.

"Within any three-hour period, you'll hear most of the music we're playing," said WAQY's Rising. "Basically, we assume people will only listen for 45 minutes or so, and then go do something else. That's why there's a lot of repetition, the same music, weather, promos, news, all within a pretty tight span."

"People don't like to admit they listen to top forty music," Rising said, "but the numbers show they're listening."

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Want to be a deejay?

So you want to be a disc jockey? Expect to be poorly paid and change jobs a lot, moving up from small stations to medium-small stations to medium-size stations.

In Springfield, a deejay earns about \$150 to \$250 a week. It's possible to make that much again doing radio commercials for ad agencies and personal appearances at promotions or school dances. But it's also possible to be stuck earning \$150 a week, period.

"Springfield is the second, maybe the third stop for a lot of people," said WAQY's Jim Rising. "You have to go to a market like Hartford before you start talking real money, twenty or twenty-five thousand a year."

In Springfield, the average disc jockey is under 30, white, male, and not from Springfield. Many got started doing odd jobs (off the air) at small hometown stations.

Most have about five years in radio before reaching Springfield and most have some college background, partic-

ularly at schools with broadcasting programs, but not all are graduates. Among the two dozen deejays at the top three stations and the new challenger (WMAS-FM); there is a grand total of one woman (overnight shift) and one black (part-time) spinning records.

Most deejays say college, rather than a specialized broadcast school, is the best way to get into radio. A local broadcast school, Dick Robinson's Connecticut School of Broadcasting, runs four-month programs that cost about \$1,300.

"There's no question Dick Robinson places a lot of people in radio," said WHYN's Mike Adams, who went there out of high school. "But a lot of people at Dick Robinson also never get that first job, and that's the one you need."

"College is a better preparation, especially if the school has a full-time campus radio station. If you don't make it in radio, you've got something to fall back on," Adams said.

Deejay at work

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station. Each contest involves taping the caller (so no ob sceneity or stage-struck and speechless caller fouls up the contest), rewinding and playing the tape, and logging names and addresses of winners.

"I never thought of myself as having a particularly good voice," Adams said. "It's kind of nasal, but I can do a lot of things with it." Off the air, he does near-perfect mimics of Gloria Gaynor's voice and gyrations, the Bee Gees, a fast-talking New York deejay, and a stoned, laid-back progressive rock deejay.

Adams is 25 and bounced around for six years at six different stations in Springfield and Hartford before landing at WHYN-AM last fall. "I got fired at

one station when I was the only one there one weekend and I just had to have something to eat," he said. "So I put on a long cut and ran over to the grocery for chocolate milk and some potato chips. The station manager picked that time to drop in."

WHYN, he says, pays a little better than most in the area, but not a killing. "If you hustle, you can make your salary and then some doing discos, personal appearances, taping commercials for ad agencies," Adams said. "I don't know if I could live on what I make at the station alone."

He said, "If there is anything radio teaches you, it's how to go to the bathroom and eat a hamburger in two minutes and 30 seconds while the news is on."

— WILLIAM K. HOWARD

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