

Marry Your Online & Offline Databases

Live happily ever after with real-time data access

A radio-station reader writes: "We want people to sign up for our loyal-listener club and be able to enter contests on our website. We also want to track on-air winners, plus we want to track listeners who attended our events. How can we do all that?"

The larger question is what kind of database you want to create — online, offline or both — and, if you have both, how to make them work together. The answer depends on your particular situation and where you collect data about your listeners.

You Need Two Databases

The first thing to evaluate is where the information going into your listener database is coming from. The majority of stations collect listener data from four main sources:

- On-air contest winners
- Registration at events
- Direct marketing campaigns

Website signups for a

loyal-listener club, contests or both. If you don't have a website or data-collection point on the Internet, then you are probably using an offline database alone. If you're at a Talk station that rarely conducts events or on-air contesting, an online database alone will suit your needs just fine. Everyone else needs both.

Because you'll be continuing to add to your databases from different collection points, you won't want to combine them. What you need is a way to access the two databases simultaneously in real time so it ap-

pears that the data from the online and offline databases have been merged into a single, consolidated database.

When will you need instant access to both databases?

- One of your PIs joins your loyal-listener club by filling out a form on your website, then calls in and wins an on-air contest. With real-time data access, the jock or producer who takes the phone call in the studio can pull up all the listener's information from a home phone number or other identifying information.

This PI has registered online, so there is no reason to take additional time and ask him all the same questions he's already answered. He can now be marked as the winner of an on-air contest and have his information sent electronically to the promotion department within seconds.

- When you are doing a local van stop or jock appearance, you can query your databases and send e-mail or direct mail to listeners near a sponsor's location to generate excitement and additional traffic. You don't want to have to remember to work on each of two separate databases — plus, the larger the database you'll be mailing

By Craig Zimmerman

to, the more you can charge the sponsor.

- If you collect e-mail addresses from winners as they win or when they pick up their prizes, you don't want to have to keep exporting information from your offline database into the online version, then filtering duplicates every time you want to e-mail your listeners.

In short, a real-time database-synchronization tool saves you time by eliminating the need to search and update multiple databases. By accessing both databases simultaneously, you can also see all the interaction a listener has with your radio station, both online and off.

Database Synchronization

The main question on database synchronization is whether you should build it or buy it. The answer depends on:

- Your online database provider. Ask your provider if it has a system in place for database synchronization.
- Your company's IT department. Does a solution already exist to handle this, or are they willing to build something for you?
- Your Internet service provider. If your ISP houses your database, ask if it has a synchronization system in place or if it can create one for you.
- Build a system from scratch. This is usually costly and time-consuming, but it can be done. There are ways to configure an off-the-shelf program such as Microsoft Access to communicate with one database while taking



IT'S A MULTICULTURAL THING Sharing the love at Emmis New York's recent multicultural presentation party at Eugene are (l-r) Chairman/CEO Jeff Smulyan, Media Planning Group Sr. Media Buyer Agnes Lukasewych, Emmis New York Sr. VP/Market Manager Barry Mayo and Emmis President/Radio Division Rick Cummings.

information from another, but it requires pretty extensive knowledge of the program and, if your database is housed elsewhere, lots of cooperation from your provider.

If you opt to build a system yourself, you may want to bring in an outside programmer to do the job. Depending on your requirements, you should estimate a minimum of 20 hours of programming time.

Use The Right Program

Programs such as Excel or Word are great for what they were designed for. Word is specifically designed to assist in writing documents. Excel is a wonderful tool for performing calculations and working with budgets. But neither program is designed to house a database.

In addition to making data entry difficult, using the wrong program limits the ways you can use your data. You can't obtain statistics and reports in a useful format, and sorting data is a big hassle.

Before you even begin to talk about online-offline synchronization, you'll need to move your databases to a program designed for database management.

You can either use one of the programs designed specifically for radio or purchase a very simple, easy-to-use database program such as MyDatabase by Elibrium. This will make data entry simpler and put your data in a format that most database programs or providers can interface with. Then you can get started with synchronization and getting the most from your databases.

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