

EASY-FM

The Voice Of The Valleys

Restricted Service Stations offer groups the opportunity to run a local radio station for activities such as fund raising. A station with a different approach was EASY-FM, as Mike Ganley explains.



Tune around the bottom or top sections of the v.h.f. broadcast band and you will often find some unusual stations. Chances are that these will be RSLs - Restricted Service Stations. These are one-off, special event, radio stations specially licensed by the Radiocommunications Authority, who allocate frequencies and specify transmitter powers of up to 25W for f.m. stations, or 50mW for a.m. ones. Many groups take advantage of this opportunity to run local radio stations, even though the transmitter powers are low and the duration of the licences are limited to two 28-day periods per year. The vast majority of RSLs are run by event organisers, like air shows or fund raising groups who often put on broadcast marathons. But one station with a different approach was EASY-FM, based at Stroud College of Further Education, which went on-air in the Stroud area of Gloucestershire for the first time in May 1993.

EASY-FM was designed to be a three-part exercise. First it would allow students on our two Media courses to get some actual on-air experience, and find out about running a real radio station. Second, our first period of transmission coincided with National Adult Learners Week, so Stroud College's Marketing Department could use us as a major advertising medium. Third, all of us involved with the project



Fig. 1: EASY-FM's original 1993 studio.

we were keen to see if such a small and well defined community would respond to what we were already calling "Gloucestershire's most local, local radio station".

Ambitious Programme

The Radio Authority were happy to grant us a licence, at the full market rate, based on an ambitious programme plan that aimed for a 50:50 speech to music ratio. This was mainly due to the educational nature

of the station. We wanted to teach serious radio, rather than just music presentation. They also gave us the full 25W of power and the unusual frequency of 87.7MHz. Another reason for choosing a high speech ratio was to save on music copyright fees, which all radio stations have to pay. This later proved to be an unnecessary fear, one of the organisations concerned granting us a full fee waiver. This only left the Performing Rights Society to pay. Even with this unexpected windfall

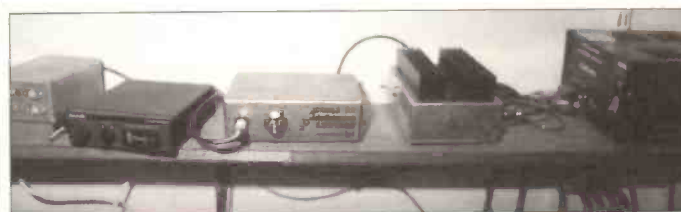


Fig. 2: The Spectrum Communications CTX100 transmitter, linear amplifier and power supply.

we averaged 40:60 ratio over the two weeks on air. Overnight our station was renamed DEEP-FM and provided dance and rave music for the younger listeners.

Technical Factors

With a licence agreed, I could now turn to the technical factors that would need to be addressed. With the help of Senior Technician, Paul Jackson, a plan of action could be drawn up. We already had a basic radio studio, used by both BTEC and City & Guilds courses. Although the equipment was a bit of a mixed bag, in terms of both age and pedigree, it would need only slight additions to go on air. We added a new (ex-BBC) cart machine, and a lot of extra wiring.

With the studio more or less ready to use, the only other major addition needed was a long-play VHS recorder for logging. Like all Radio Authority stations EASY-FM is required to record **all** of its output. Using eight-hour tapes in a hi-fi video is the most cost-effective way of doing this and most local stations now log this way. We now needed a transmitter and antenna. First choice would have been to hire a complete rig, but the various quotations came to a fee of around £600 for the two-week period. This was frankly too high, so I had to look at other possibilities.