

# How Radio Reps Are Navigating A Permanently Altered Sales Terrain.

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Last year's stay-at-home orders didn't just cause listeners to seek out their favorite stations and personalities on internet-connected devices in the home. They also compelled radio sales teams to focus more on selling their digital assets.

As on-air ad cancellations piled up during the trough of the 2020 ad recession, digital sales at Beasley Media Group's Las Vegas cluster were practically recession-proof, Director of Sales Cory Cuddeback said during a Futuri-sponsored webinar this week. And with 100% of sales staff compensation generated from commissions, sellers leaned further into digital. "Selling digital became a necessity. They needed to sell something to earn commission. And so the education about our digital assets and how to sell it became a necessity again," he said. Fast forward to third quarter 2021 and Cuddeback said digital sales at the cluster are up 300% and now account for 30% of revenues, while continuing to grow.

Keith Hotchkiss, President of the Cleveland Metro for iHeartMedia, said changes in media consumption habits triggered by the pandemic enabled sellers to have more productive conversations with clients and prospects about the audiences they're looking to attract. "Some of the uniqueness of digital is that ability for radio stations and radio groups to step outside the audiences that their stations traditionally attracted," Hotchkiss said, opening doors to multicultural and business-to-business clients that the station may not have been working with before. "It also gives us an opportunity to talk about agility," he added, meaning radio's ability to reach audiences on devices and computers in addition to over the air radio.

### **Video Pitches Gain Traction**

Beyond greater attention to digital, the events of the past 18 months profoundly affected how business is conducted. In place of a deck or a one-sheet emailed to clients pre-COVID – which may or may not have been read – video has become a more effective pitch conduit. "We're putting our sales presentations on video, and sending it to people where we can't have a face to face," Cuddeback explained. These are usually quick-hitting 30-or 60-second pieces. "What we're finding is it gets a lot more traction than just a PDF of a proposal."

Although sellers are ready for a return to face-to-face meetings, many clients remain apprehensive. So they're given the option of an in-office or a Zoom meeting. "Probably half of them say Zoom, which is surprising. But that's just the way it is now," Cuddeback said.

With Americans getting back to pre-pandemic activities, albeit with a careful eye on the highly contagious Delta variant, radio's category mix is shifting. Job recruitment is big, panelists at the Wednesday afternoon "Navigating Change: How Top Broadcast Sales Execs Are Succeeding" session said. Entertainment and events are exploding.

Krista Freeman, General Sales Manager at Cumukus Media Memphis, cited these categories, along with professional services, legal, real estate, financial advisors and auto aftermarket as among the most in demand. "We saw a really big rebound with QSR in Q2, and I think that we're going to continue to see QSR be one of those big categories," she said. And with online sports gambling legal in Tennessee, Freeman also reported a spike in sportsbook advertising.

### **Incoming: Category Specialists**

There is a growing expectation among local business owners that their media rep also needs to be a marketing expert who can help them grow their business. In light of that trend, Hotchkiss predicted different sales reps will specialize in different verticals. "It's really going to be important for people in 2022 to become subject matter experts in certain verticals," he said. Rather than expecting one rep to be proficient in categories as diverse as education, legal, financial, and auto, he envisions companies having an education team, a legal team, a political team and so forth. "Being curious and an expert in a specific category will help you to really excel because everything is becoming more specialized," he said.

Read "How Sales Teams Brainstorm When There's No Water Cooler To Bring Them Together" [HERE](#). Watch a recording of both Futuri webinars [HERE](#).