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Radio On Frontlines Of Providing Real-Time Info On Pandemic.

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CORONAVIRUS

News/talk stations are in high gear covering the coronavirus pandemic, while music stations are also being called upon to provide the latest information, including updates on the widening cancellations of tours, concerts, sports and community events. As this extraordinary moment in history unfolds, broadcast radio is rising to the occasion.

Radio is reacting and adjusting to the crisis in real time. It's an unprecedented event that has programmers switching into crisis mode to provide the latest information, which is affecting all aspects of life, from entertainment to sporting events and political gatherings, to simple tasks such as getting groceries.

Planning a course of action is crucial in any crisis. Radio has been at the forefront of informing citizens through disasters before – from tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and wildfires to 9/11 and the days, weeks and months that followed. However, “this situation feels very much unlike other disasters that have impacted the U.S.,” Fred Jacobs writes on the Jacobs Media blog. “This one is approaching us like a slow-moving tidal wave.”

Steve Butler, former Program Director of Entercom news KYW Philadelphia and Adjunct Instructor at Temple University's Klein College of Media and Communication, tells **Inside Radio** the first step should be an all hands-on deck meeting. “Find out how this crisis could, or is already affecting [your staff's] everyday lives... fear of closed schools, childcare issues, the kids' soccer league, sick leave questions....” Butler says you'll leave the room with “50 or so ideas in no time.”

Entercom Senior VP of Programming Jeff Sottolano says the company's news outlets are broadcasting “around-the-clock coverage of press conferences, expert interviews, and news tailored to the community.” Entercom also activated its national network of radio stations and are sharing news content and updates.

While it is very much a news event, music radio should also be providing information to their listeners. “I can see music stations also doing something informative. I think you need to act now with a short-form feature that airs multiple times a day – maybe even in a regular spot in the hour – with info about how people and institutions are dealing with the crisis,” Butler offers.

That's exactly the course of action Hubbard classic rock “The Drive” WDRV Chicago took as it “launched an hourly ‘COVID-19 Chicago Update’ series, which runs adjacent to stop-sets every hour from 6am-7pm,” PD Rob Cressman explains. The reports are delivered by Jill Egan, Executive Producer of the “Sherman & Tingle Show” during morning drive and Bob Stroud's midday show. Janda, co-host of “The Seaver and Janda Show,” handles the updates through 7pm. “Every report is live and consists of the latest local and national headlines along with brief details on WDRV promotional events and activities which have been postponed or canceled in the interest of public safety,” Cressman continues.

In its Local Radio Pandemic Checklist, Paragon Research says, “Music stations should continue to be a source of entertainment and a respite from the news, but also consider a branded hourly update,” similar to what The Drive has done. The Paragon checklist provides suggestions and guidelines, from

how to re-shape your e-newsletter to what advertising or underwriting should be pulled. "This is a time for local radio to come together and for all of us to collaborate," Paragon founder Mike Henry writes on the company website.

Street Teams On Stand-By.

On Thursday morning (March 12), Beasley Media Group country WXTU Philadelphia broke the news to listeners that the evening's Dan + Shay concert at Wells Fargo Center was postponed. The band's busses were seen leaving the venue overnight and news broke that the venue was closed for cleaning following the Sixers-Pistons basketball game. The Pistons played the Utah Jazz on Tuesday (March 10), where Jazz player Rudy Gobert tested positive for coronavirus, leading to the suspension of the rest of the NBA season.

Sottolano says Entercom has "been closely following safety guidelines shared by officials in response to the virus" and is evaluating events, appearances, and live remotes "on a case-by-case basis."

Cressman has also been following the guidance of public officials. To protect the safety of loyal fans, WDRV canceled its weekly Traveling Thirsty Thursday happy hour event and postponed The Fourth Annual St Patty's Pub Crawl, originally scheduled for Saturday afternoon, March 14.

Meanwhile, some SAG-AFTRA members are being advised that they should not attend events away from the station if they feel uncomfortable doing so. "Union members worried about coming into work due to possible contamination may be able to use special paid leave, depending on individual contracts," the union said in an email to members. "These instances would be particular to individual and station contracts and agreements. – Jay Gleason