

Custom Tailoring Radio Tape Services*

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RECOGNIZING THE diversity of Texas agriculture and the contrasting geographical differences in Texas, we set out to establish a regular radio tape service which would have something to offer for all parts of the state. With rice in southeast Texas, citrus and vegetables in the Rio Grande Valley, peanuts in central Texas, huge cattle feedlots in the Panhandle, and vast rangelands in west Texas, we could easily see that a "packaged" tape service, where everyone receives the same program, would not be meaningful.

We began an individualized approach to our radio tape service two years ago. Prior to that time, there had not been a regular number of new selections available each week and usage of available tapes had dropped considerably from previous years. We felt a new direction was needed.

By individualized radio tape service, we mean a service which is responsive to individual needs of radio stations and county extension agents. Each week, users of the Texas Extension Radio Tape Service choose radio selections they wish to receive from a listing of at least 12 new topics. Selections on agricultural, horticultural, consumer, home economics and youth subjects are listed. After making their choices, extension agents and radio stations receive tapes containing only selections they request. This is what we mean by *individualized* service. Users may request one, three, five, nine or maybe all of the new selections listed.

New listings of tape recordings available from our office are mailed each week to all county extension personnel in the state

*This talk was presented by Mr. Quinn at the 1972 AAACE meeting, Tucson, Arizona.

and to about 70 radio stations. With the listing is an order form for them to use in requesting selections they need. When order forms are returned, our office prepares individual tapes containing selections requested. Generally, all requests are filled the same day in which they are received.

Let's take a closer look at the weekly tape listing. Each selection is listed with a code number, title, and its length. Also, the extension specialist or resource person is identified by name and title. Selections are grouped by type of presentation. Some are listed under the category of "Introduced by" and others "Interviewed by." This description denotes whether the selection is simply introduced and closed, or whether it has been done in an interview format. Short news spots are also included in the listing as well as special regional tapes whenever they are available. Our area information specialists aid us in preparing specific topics for East or West Texas. We hope to include more regional tapes for more areas of the state in the future.

The order form which accompanies the listing was designed to require minimum effort in requesting selections. The form includes all code numbers in the order they appeared on the tape listing. Radio station personnel or county agents can simply check the blanks next to code numbers of selections they wish to request. They also have the option of ordering written or taped introductions for all non-interview tapes. If they check written introduction, they will receive the selection with no taped introduction and close. Information for them to use in introducing and closing the selection is supplied in written form. If neither option is checked or if "taped introduction" is marked, selections are sent complete with taped intro and close.

The user then writes in his name and address and dates the order. A "remarks" section is provided for comments. They may want a special sequence of selections which is different from our listing, or they may have other special instructions for us as to when selections are needed if time is critical. We have also obtained many valuable suggestions on ways to improve our service from comments noted in the remarks section.

When filling requests from county agents and radio stations,

title slips are placed in the tape boxes and numbered so the user will know the order in which selections occur on the tape. Return mail labels are also enclosed for radio stations' use in returning tapes.

The weekly tape listings are mailed Wednesday mornings. Apparently, many users complete the form immediately upon receipt because we usually begin receiving requests late Thursday or Friday. The rush of orders usually tapers off by the next Wednesday. We encourage agents and radio stations to order tape selections the week they are listed; however, the selections, unless otherwise noted, are available for three months after listing. Tapes are automatically retired from our active library after that period. We feel this helps prevent use of outdated information and allows a constant input of new information. We do maintain inactive storage of all tape selections for 12 months.

To speed up duplication of tapes when filling requests, we transfer original recordings to seven-inch reels in the same sequence as they are listed. This lessens the number of master tape changes required for duplicating individual selections. Normally, all selections listed fit on two or three seven-inch reels. Presently, we are using three Ampex recorders to handle all requests. Master tapes are played at 15 inches per second on one machine and copied on the two other machines. Order forms are sorted when possible so that two orders for the same selections can be run at the same time. We hope to add a third copying machine soon.

This may sound like a slow process, but we have handled requests for more than 200 individual selections in one day. Two student assistants and two secretary-technicians now handle tape duplication and other supporting work. When we began this system, all tape duplication, recordkeeping and related correspondence work was done by one secretary-technician. One might say that she was a real "super-duper." Fortunately, she's still with us. In fact, she continues to find ways to improve our efficiency.

I must credit her with devising many of the recordkeeping methods we use for all tapes made and requests received for them. When we began the individualized approach to a radio tape service, we established a number code system which is still in use. Take for

example this number, 72F-14. The 72 stands for the year 1972. The letter F, being the sixth letter in the alphabet, stands for the month of June, and the number 14 indicates that the selection was the 14th made that month. This number is placed on the tab of a file card used to post all requests for the 72F-14 selection. Whenever a request for that selection is received from a radio station, the call letters, city and date are posted on the card. The same is done for county agents requesting tapes. File cards are prepared for every selection included in weekly listings.

A card is also made for each extension specialist or resource person who makes a tape. Titles and dates are entered on this card for each tape the individual makes.

This recordkeeping system gives us data used in compiling quarterly reports for extension specialists on requests received for tapes they made. The report lists the total number of selections each individual recorded during the three-month period and the total requests received from radio stations and county agents for radio tapes made. This helps us show extension specialists the value of using radio to communicate their information. It also helps in evaluating our radio tape service. We feel that if tape selections are requested, the percentage of use should be reasonably high. However, we plan to do further evaluation of use in the near future.

Radio selections offered in this tape service vary in length and mostly run from 2½ to 3½ minutes. They are what we term "segment programming," or, in other words, designed for use within someone's program. However, we have learned that they stand well on their own and combine easily to form a regular program. A 100,000-watt FM station serving the Houston area tells us they use our service for a regular five-minute program, seven days a week. WOAI Radio, a 50,000-watt AM station in San Antonio, uses them as a regular feature on their weekday morning programming. The last we heard from them was "send us all the selections you can." WOAI is one of seven radio stations that tell us to send them "X" number of tapes per week. They ask us to choose selections for them instead of their requesting specific ones.

To avoid situations where a county agent may wish to use our

radio selections on a station also using the tape service, we conducted a survey of county agents last year. We told agents we were interested in offering our tape service to more radio stations, but we didn't want to approach them without agents' consent. We asked them to indicate whether they would contact all the stations in their county or whether they wanted us to contact them. After tabulating counties in which we were given permission to contact stations, we did so and picked up several new users.

Since initiation of our present radio tape service two years ago, our number of requests filled has continued to rise. Before we began, only 100-200 selections were being sent out per month. Now we're averaging more than 300 per week. The highest month on record was one in which we filled more than 1,600 requests for individual selections.

The thought occurred to us when we began this approach, "What if we make a tape that nobody wants?" Well, we've come close, but there's always been at least someone interested in every selection. We listed a tape related to rice production which only received one request—but a radio station covering the entire Texas rice belt ordered it. So maybe in some instances it's not the number of requests received which tells you whether or not you've reached your audience. We fill an average of 18 requests per selection. The percentage of use by radio stations and county agents is about 50-50. Numbers of radio stations using the service continues to increase. Just two weeks ago, a Houston radio station representative came by to inquire about the tape service and took several selections home with him to use. Several county agents now order selections and ask that they be sent directly to radio stations.

We continue to refine our service through suggestions from our users as well as new ideas of our own. The "individualized radio tape service" approach seems to please our users and has certainly revived our radio efforts.