School of Journalism

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**THE PROMOTION PROBLEM** \*

How Should KXZP-TV Position and Promote Its News?

KXZP-TV, an ABC affiliate on channel 6 in a top-30 market, was stuck in second place for its early and late news. The NBC affiliate, KSJV-TV, was number one in prime time, late fringe, and in both late (10:00-10:35 p.m.) and early (6:00-6:30 p.m.) news. KXZP's early news, although in second place, was close to KSJV's early news. KXZP's late news was usually two or three rating points behind KSJV's.

KXZP was the only television station in the market to program a half-hour newscast at 4:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. Both newscasts were beaten in the ratings and demos by syndicated programs on the other stations, but the ratings were respectable and highly salable. "Oprah" led into the 4:00 p.m. newscast, which was second in its time period, and "Jeopardy" led into the 5:00 p.m. newscast, which was followed by ABC's network news. "Wheel of Fortune," in prime access, lead out of the 6:00 p.m. newscast. KXZP also had a one-hour newscast at 12:00 noon, which was number one in its time period, and had been for years. KXZP ran a local news program from 6:00-7:00 a.m., which was number one in its time period.

KXZP had a strong local news and community service image. Its approach to news was conservative, straightforward, journalistically sound, and non-sensational. It attempted to be the Journal of Record in local news, and was generally perceived to be so by the audience, as confirmed by research conducted by AR&D, its news consultant.

KXZP had excellent, arresting graphics, a new and attractive set, and more remote equipment than the other stations. It consistently did more live shots than the other stations.

KXZP also had the best-known weatherperson in the market, Joe Edwards. Joe was a native of the city and had been in the market and on KXZP for 35 years. He was an expert on tornados, and regularly showed up in locations where tornados hit and led fund-raising relief efforts.

All of KXZP's anchors were also natives of the city and were well known (they tested extremely well – only one anchor at KSJV did better). The anchors were mature, bright, good journalists, and cooperative. The main anchor, a white male, did the 5:00, 6:00 and 10:00 p.m. newscasts. His co-anchor on the 10:00 p.m. was a white female, and on the 5:00 and 6:00 a black female, who also did the 4:00 p.m. alone. The two female anchors tested very well, especially the black female. Only one of KSJV's three main anchors was a native of the city.

KXZP's sports anchor was the play-by-play announcer for the state university's football team (a perennial top-ten team), was well known and popular with the station's core male audience.

KXZP had developed several well-known franchises, the best-known of which was "Consumer Watch." The reporter who did "Consumer Watch" was an excellent investigative reporter. She had won several national awards and was regularly sited in newspaper columns for excellent reporting. Legislation had been passed in the state as a result of several of her reports. KXZP's "Health Watch" segment featured a local doctor, who had become a popular celebrity in the market. The news director of KXZP was considering adding a "Legal Watch" segment featuring a local attorney who had become well known during the station's coverage of the O. J. Simpson and Timothy McVeigh trials.

KXZP’s news consultant, AR&D, had recommended featuring local business news in the station’s early morning news program, although the news director had not made a decision yet.

KXZP had positioned its news as "NewsCenter 6" and "Six On Your Side" for years. The station ran a schedule of half topical promotions and half image promotions that emphasized the anchors and the "Six On Your Side" slogan. Little or no attention was given to the news franchises. Two years ago, KSJV, on the advice of its news consultant, Frank Magid & Associates, used the positioning statement "Where News Comes First." KSJV hit the slogan hard in its newscasts and in promos. KSJV's topical promos (that's the only kind of promotion they did) were fast, glitzy, and continually reinforced the station's "action news" approach – sensational, tabloid, "if-it-bleeds-it-leads."

The news director of KXZP was unhappy with being in second place in her most important newscasts and with the overall news promotion effort. She agreed with AR&D, which had indicated that KXZP had a "promotion problem."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

While the incidents in this case are not factual, they do represent a composite of actual conditions and operating practices of some companies. This case was prepared to use as a teaching tool.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Brainstorm and come up with solutions to the "promotion problem."
   1. New positioning statement
   2. New, promotable franchises
   3. New promotion scheduling strategy

\* This case was prepared by Charles Warner