

# Brilliant on the Basics Newsletter

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## Can you really find happiness (and audience growth) combining News and Jazz? They're getting there at WDUQ.

There are a few people in public radio, but only a few, who you can count on to speak their mind. Candor and get-to-the-point manners don't always sit well with public radio types who cherish civility, almost to a fault. Then there are people whose grace and humor are a gift to all. They too stand out — but for very different reasons. They make life's heavy lifting just a little easier. Building a strong management team requires some of both, a clear focus and a light touch. In the right proportions the combination can be explosive, which, I believe, is what we're seeing at WDUQ.

Their management team includes GM Scott Hanley, who cuts through bull as well as anyone in public radio, and Membership Director Mike Plaskett, whose humor and creativity have been a welcome addition to otherwise-dry BoB meetings. Together with Development Director Mary Lloyd, PD Director Dave Becker and Technology Director Chuck Leavens, Scott and Mike have transformed WDUQ from "the other station in Pittsburgh" into a national-caliber station on the front ranks of public radio.

This transformation did not come quickly or easily. Like KPLU in Tacoma, WDUQ fuses a no-holds-barred commitment to *real jazz* with NPR news in drive-time. Full-time jazz stations are increasingly rare in both public and commercial radio. Even News+Jazz split formats appear to be in decline for two reasons: first, that format combination (generally) does not "fund raise" like all-news or classical/news; and second, jazz programmers, even more than their classical peers, have struggled to find the right blend of new, old, smooth, rough, different and familiar music. Even the best jazz/news stations can be torn by the conflicting demands from a divided audience. But DUQ seems to be doing it. Their audience is up, along with their membership.

In this issue of the BoB Newsletter, Mike Plaskett talks about the evolution of membership work at WDUQ from "old IBM-PC's, using an old version of WordPerfect, and printing on a dot matrix printer" to a station ready to adopt the most advanced membership systems and practices.

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## Interview with Mike Plaskett, Membership Manager for W DUQ-FM, Pittsburgh:

Mike and I began the interview with a discussion about the confusing state of performance measurements. Even with all the software, hardware and analysis, it can still be hard to know exactly how you're doing.

*MF: Even with all those reservations, Mike, do you agree that you are doing substantially better this year than you did last year?*

*MP: I certainly do.*

*When you get together with your other staff members, how do you explain your improved membership?*

We're more focused on the entire membership task. When you start looking at what you're doing, in detail, and really become aware of the impact of different actions, things seem often to improve. Just the process of concentrating seems to bring some improvement. In our case, we have made some very important changes in the way we do pledge campaigns. We're improving the way we ask people to renew.

*When did you first begin to look for these improvements? Was it in the post-Newt era... or was it part of a systematic station renewal project?*

Some of it came from the post-Newt era, because we knew that was a bump and we would have to work hard to keep membership at the new level. Part of it is the way Scott [Hanley] runs the station. He's got a very step by step, calm way of doing business. We sat down and saw that we had some problems. When we got our Target

Analysis, we saw that we had some things we could improve. Scott saw these as opportunities... things that could only get better.

*Going back to the initial BoB meeting in May, 1997, what were you already looking at to improve your membership performance? I'm talking about "pre-BoB" improvement strategies.*

Our first major advance in getting W DUQ's fund raising effort up-to-date was to graduate from IBM/DOS computers, clunky software and dot-matrix printing technology to modern hardware and software. We now use Windows 95 and Word For Windows 95 and HP laser printers. We have much more mailing power and flexibility, and our output is much better-looking. One of our first technical advances was automating charge-card payments, and it was slow to come on line. Although we purchased the "MAPP-PC" utility that works in conjunction with MEMSYS, we encountered hardware and network problems that took months to solve. Once we were able to make the installation work, and after we became proficient in using it, we could go forward with more aggressive promotion of charge contributions. Now, in our immediate future is the opportunity to develop sustaining giving programs.

And that reminds me of another tool that's still taking us a long time to put in place, Electronic Fund Transfer. Long before BOB, we were looking for a way to implement EFT. Our licensee, Duquesne University, isn't ready to let us go ahead.

*What kind of computers were you using?*

We had old IBM-PC's, using an old version of WordPerfect, and printing on a dot matrix printer. Even that was far beyond what the station used to do. I've been here for almost 18 years (first as a volunteer for nine years, then as a paid staff member), and I can re-

## WDUQ Membership STATS

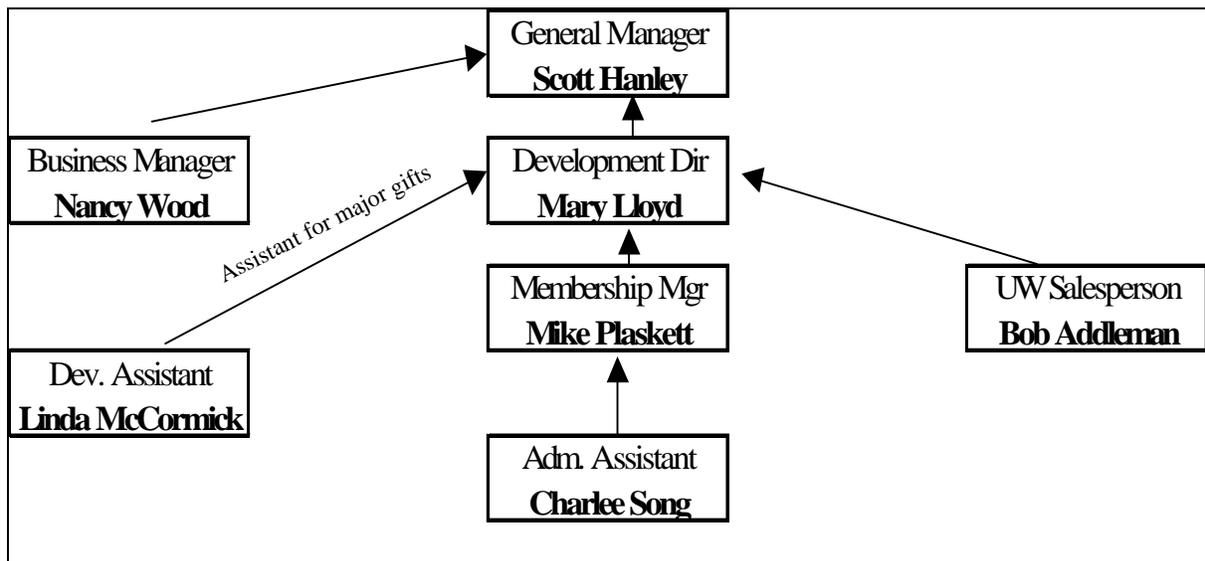
	<b>FY96 Actual</b>	<b>FY97 Actual</b>	<b>% change</b>	<b>FY98 Estimated</b>	<b>% change</b>	<b>FY99 Targets</b>
<b>Cume</b>	100,000	102,700	2.7%	119,900	16.7%	125,000
<b>Members</b>	8,486	8,506	0.2%	9,473	11.4%	10,900
<b>Cume Penetration</b>		8.3%		7.9%		8.7%
<b>Member \$</b>	\$684,126	\$691,000	1.0%	\$790,297	14.4%	\$856,000
<b>\$ per listener</b>	\$6.84	\$6.73		\$6.59		\$6.85
<b>\$ per member</b>	\$80.62	\$81.24		\$83.43		\$78.53

### Member \$ By Source

<b>New</b>	\$175,579	\$151,846		\$137,040		\$145,000
<b>Renewal</b>	\$471,734	\$482,471		\$573,690		\$670,000
<b>Other</b>	\$ 36,804	\$ 56,683		\$ 79,567		\$ 41,000

<b>Overall Retention Rate</b>		52.1%				
<b>First Yr Retention rate</b>		37.9%				
<b>Multi yr Retention rate</b>		63.2%				

## WDUQ Development Staffing



member when the station kept track of members on 3x5 index cards. It's been a steady march of progress since that time. When I arrived the computational ability of the department was very primitive. Scott and our Technology Director Chuck Leavens helped us make a big improvement there-- with much better computers, up-to-date software and laser printers. I appreciate the increased computing power, though not being a kid of the computer generation, it doesn't come as quickly to me as it might to someone who's 19.

*Have you been able to keep up with it?*

Yes. I'm lucky that I find that kind of work very enjoyable. My biggest challenge is finding the time to sit down and really figure out how to master some of the computer work. For example, George Lombardi (at WSHU in Fairfield, CT) has been doing some excellent work interconnecting MEMSYS with FileMaker Pro. But I just haven't had the time to play with it. Much of my personal time — nights or weekends — that might otherwise be devoted to “hacking” goes to my [jazz] program that I do on WDUQ. The management at DUQ is allowing me to syndicate the program this year, and I already spend hours preparing for that show. In addition to my day job, and my show, “Rhythm Sweet and Hot,” at any time there are about thirty books that I'm reading.

*You mentioned that you made significant changes in your drives this year, what were those changes?*

We focused a lot more on the drives themselves. We got rid of “special premiums”... those individual things that people contribute to the station. We felt we were spending too much time selling somebody's CD or book, without selling the benefits of

the station. We are using time freed up from pitching merchandise to pitch the worth and value of the radio station. The same goes for the regular premiums. Now we're offering premiums that relate to what we do.

*You also said you changed your renewals.*

We were looking at these things before we got into BoB. I was learning, figuring out how to upgrade and improve the letters we were sending. I had been to a couple of MEMSYS seminars that Nick Herlick held. His sessions were very helpful. It started with that, and we've been moving on it ever since.

*Did you change your renewal cycle?*

I did, but until recently I had not been able to make it stick. Renewals need to become a routine. After an initial irresolute start, I just got caught up in other activities, including the drives and several other mailings that we send each year. Things are changing. I recognize the need to stick to a routine, and people at the station support my efforts to stay focused.

*Did you start anything in major gifts?*

For the first time, we have started to develop a major gifts unit. Mary Lloyd and her assistant, Linda McCormick, are working on that. They're still in the early stages of that effort.

*Did you initiate new efforts?*

Yes, we started to use telemarketing. We launched our first effort in November. We used Direct Advantage here in Pittsburgh, and they did a fine job. It was a very good start.

*Did you eliminate any activities that just weren't working for you?*

The biggest one has been special premiums. Administering and handling them took so much work, Scott now senses that by eliminating special premiums we've practically added an extra person in the department.

*Did you expand your membership staff?*

No, when Linda McCormick moved over from membership to major gifts, we did not replace her with a full-time person. We fortunately found a sensational part-time person, who only works about sixteen hours per week. So we've actually lost staff when compared with last year.

*What about hardware and software. Any differences in that area?*

As I mentioned, we've been using MEMSYS for a long time. And we appreciate every upgrade. I find Nick very easy to work with. He's an enormously helpful guy. With his help, we've improved our skills with the program. The other end of this is that we installed Windows95 and put Word for Windows on that.

*When did you put the credit card module in your system?*

About two years ago. That was not a working utility for several months.

*Did you do additional outsourcing this year?*

Yes. We've used a mailing house a couple of times for larger mailings. We're still looking for a mailing house that can give me the flexibility that I need. Right now, we're putting out monthly renewal mailings from our office, using a laser printer.

*Besides the installment billing module, did you find other things that started to pay off this year?*

For on-air pledging, one thing that we did was move to a producer system, which was a change for us.

*How about the BoB project? How did you see that benefiting you and WDUQ?*

Personally, I find BoB rewarding and help-

ful. I've finally had this chance to meet repetitively with some fine professionals -- not just a conference where a bunch of people are thrown into a room for a while. It takes time for people to learn who's solid and to establish the level of trust where people can discuss things without reservation. As far as I'm concerned, the repetition of topics is really good. I find the steady association to be very helpful.

The ideas that have come out so far, as you well know, have been excellent. We picked a focus of renewals. And if we had picked another focus, I'm sure that equally helpful techniques would have emerged. I really liked the process.

*Mike, when you got your Target Analysis, what was your reaction?*

Surprise and chagrin, because I imagined our renewal rate was better than it was! But Jim Lewis broke it to me gently: there was a lot of room for improvement. Actually, considering our local market conditions and our status as latecomers to fund raising, we weren't bad. We were respectable and even good in some areas. Fortunately for my tender ego, management expressed confidence that we could show significant improvement.

*Will the Target Analysis make a difference in the way you do things next year?*

Scott Hanley is showing me how to wade through the numbers and make sense of them. The Target Analysis numbers are extremely revealing. It's like shining a searchlight on your work habits and methods. But Target Analysis can't be evaluated out of context. There's market demographics, the competition your station faces, and other special advantages you might or might not enjoy-- including how much your listening audience loves the station's programming.

*Did you have a particular station that you used as a model for improvement?*

No, I was just impressed with so many of the other stations. I felt that the people in the BoB group were very bright, very capable. I was impressed by the quality of the people that I was able to hang out with—people whose ideas I can steal with confidence.

*Did anything fail this year? Did you have anything that didn't work out?*

Not really. Most of the tweaks we tried worked for other people before us, and do not entail any magic. And I should add that we were very happy that our Program Director Dave Becker delivered some excellent numbers for us.

*What do you mean by that?*

I think he's done an excellent job. Our format is largely NPR news programs in drivetime and jazz at other times. Dave is profoundly appreciative of all kinds of jazz, but he feels that rather than confronting listeners with difficult music, we can entertain them with selections that are more accessible. Dave and our Music Director, Evelyn Hawkins, have developed a musical sound that is both righteous and enjoyable for almost everybody. They're pulling up the former "sag" between the "tentpoles" and earning a more and more loyal following. Dollars pledged during mid-day pledging is showing a nice improvement.

*Looking ahead to next year, Mike, what will you be doing?*

Much more attention to the renewal program. And I am segmenting it even more, breaking out donors who are being asked to renew for the first time, adding some

tender love and care. Nobody is sure what works for first-time renewers. I don't know if that's going to improve the renewal rates, but I'm hopeful that we can see some improvement.

*How about the drives?*

Well, our drives will be shorter. Both drives will be less than ten days. And we'll do a short drive in June -- just a day or so -- aimed at new members. Basically we'll be looking for shorter more focused drives.

*Anything completely new?*

I'm trying to learn both Page Maker and File Maker Pro. I've got those programs installed and now I need to find the time to work with them. Page Maker will come in handy because there are some mailing formats that just don't work with Word.

*Any staff expansion?*

I don't think we'll be adding more staff. I will be hoping to keep on one of our current interns, a student who really has turned out to be excellent, in addition to the ones who help during the school year

*Any outsourcing?*

I'm still looking for a mailing house that I can work with conveniently and flexibly, and that accepts the small volumes that we have at a

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