

Submission to Select Committee on Communications Digital switchover of television and radio

Contact information

Richard Lace, Community Radio Project Manager
On behalf of Prescap Ltd, 5A Walton's Parade, Preston PR1 8QT
01772 880791 / richard@prescap.co.uk

Introduction

1. Prescap Ltd (Preston Community Arts Project) is a registered charity, currently running the "Preston FM" community radio project in Preston, Lancashire. The project launched in 2005 and is currently broadcasting under a full-time community radio licence, issued by Ofcom. Preston FM currently engages around 300 volunteers from Preston and the surrounding areas, as well as working with a large number of community, voluntary and statutory organisations in the city.
2. Community radio stations are non-profit-making radio services, designed to operate on a small-scale and to deliver community benefits ('social gain') to one or more communities. The first station launched in 2005 and there are currently over 200 licensed stations in the UK.
3. In autumn 2009, Prescap was engaged by the Digital Switchover Help Scheme to help raise awareness of the Help Scheme before and during the digital television switchover in the Granada region. On behalf of the Help Scheme, Prescap engaged 19 community radio stations across the region (including its own station, Preston FM) to broadcast on-air content to raise awareness of the services offered to eligible people by the Help Scheme.
4. The community radio activity commissioned by the Help Scheme aimed to target eligible people – and the friends and family of eligible people – with a specific focus on hard-to-reach communities that are well served by community radio stations.

Activities and outputs

5. Activity took place in two waves – the first centred around an "Action Week" prior to the first switchover date in the region (DSO1), where all participating stations broadcast Community Service Announcements (CSAs), interviews and reports connected to the Help Scheme. The high intensity of coverage during the week was supplemented by a "nose" and "tail" of CSA broadcasts before and after the Action Week. The second wave of activity took place immediately before and after the second switchover date (DSO2), and consisted of CSAs and vox-pops.
6. In total across the two waves, participating stations collectively produced:
 - a) 166 CSAs, broadcast a total of 14,734 times, in English and seven community languages.
 - b) 37 interviews, broadcast 105 times.
 - c) Over 100 broadcasts of a report following beneficiaries of the Help Scheme.
 - d) Audio, text and visual content on 19 station websites.
7. In addition, many of the participating community radio stations undertook additional activities to promote the Help Scheme and to raise awareness of the

digital switchover more generally. These included roadshows; on-air features; news coverage; direct promotion to local people involved in the stations' activities; and provision of volunteers to assist with staffing help points and running re-tuning demonstrations.

8. A total of 307 community radio volunteers were involved in preparing and implementing the activity, alongside 52 community radio staff and nine interview guests supplied by the Help Scheme; EAGA; Digital UK; and Digital Outreach. The project was co-ordinated by Prescap, liaising with the main Help Scheme office in London and local Help Scheme staff in the region.

Impact

9. Feedback from listeners was strong – and participating stations received more than 650 contacts from members of the public during the project. The majority of contacts were requesting more information about the Help Scheme specifically, or the switchover in general. In particular, stations targeting speakers of community languages reported a relatively high number of callers, and station personnel were able to explain about the switchover (in an appropriate language) and direct callers to the Help Scheme number where appropriate.
10. Common themes within listener feedback included:
 - a) Listeners from the help scheme target groups who were not aware of the switchover and/or the help scheme. Listeners contacted stations to clarify the messages being broadcast or to request more information on the topic.
 - b) Listeners who had themselves taken advantage of the help scheme (or whose friends or family had done so), who contacted stations to express their thanks for making them aware of what was available or to share their positive experiences of the scheme. The fact that some listeners made the effort to contact stations in this way is indicative of a larger number of “silent” listeners whose awareness was raised by the campaign.
 - c) Some confusion over specific issues – mostly related to the effect the switchover would have on analogue radio or the loss of the correct regional BBC service during switchover – which stations were able to address directly or refer to other appropriate sources of information.
 - d) Many requests for help on specific personal circumstances – be it with regard to equipment or eligibility for help. Again, these were dealt with directly if the answer was readily apparent, or referred as appropriate.
 - e) Some negative feedback from those who were not welcoming of the switchover, for cost or picture quality reasons.
11. Impact was not confined to listeners: most participating stations identified benefits for the local volunteers taking part in the project, who had engaged with enthusiasm and enjoyment. In particular, the “kudos” of being involved in a project with the BBC was a highlight for many volunteers. This enthusiasm also filtered down to volunteers spreading the key messages within their own friendship groups and family networks, adding to the impact of the campaign.

Conclusions and learning points

12. We believe that the involvement of community radio in supporting the Help Scheme before and after the digital switchover in the Granada region had a significant impact in ensuring that eligible people were aware of, and able to take advantage of, the assistance available to them through the scheme.
13. The community radio sector in the North West is proud of how it has helped to raise the profile of the Help Scheme. The collaboration between participating stations – many of them very small, volunteer-led organisations – and the various agencies involved in the switchover (led in this project by the Help Scheme) was a positive experience for all involved. Community radio stations were able to achieve more by working together than they would have done individually; and the impact evidenced by the project will encourage more joint working in the future. The relationship built up between the stations and switchover organisations helped not only with the Help Scheme project but also with other switchover-related content carried by participating stations. The fee paid by the Help Scheme for the project will also help stations – many of whom regularly struggle for funding – to continue their wider social-gain activities.
14. The success of the project was underpinned by the understanding of the community radio sector displayed by the Help Scheme: working alongside community radio is not the same as commissioning an advertising campaign on a commercial radio station. This understanding, coupled with a flexible and pragmatic approach to the project on both sides, resulted in a collaborative piece of work with maximum impact.
15. Learning gained from the project has been passed on to the Community Media Association (CMA – the national umbrella body for community radio and television) to assist with potential future community radio involvement as switchover comes to other areas of the UK. It is hoped that future switchover regions will benefit from the experiences of the Granada project – Prescap will continue to liaise with the CMA and the Help Scheme wherever possible to ensure this.

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