

GEARED TO THE *PULS* OF TIME

PORTRAIT OF A CATHOLIC RADIO STATION IN POLAND'S SILESIA

by Andrea Jannusch

The name is like the programme: *PULS* is a Catholic radio station which really feels the *PULS* of life. Although it started as an experiment and was not expected to live longer than two or three months, on its first birthday in April 1994, the radio station already claims to have left infancy behind while celebrating a rather successful childhood.

Reason enough for CAMECO to introduce this radio station. Although it is not the only one with a similar approach. It is not even new, but still a rather unknown example which could be an *imPULS* to stimulate discussion among Catholic radio professionals in other regions of the world.

At the very beginning, the action seemed to be totally improvised: Money was collected in the newly built-up diocese of Gliwice, technicians and producers brought in their private HiFi-equipment as starting capital, and the director, a priest named Mikolaj Skawinski, donated the proceeds from the sale of a private car. Mountaineering friends installed the transmitting equipment on the church tower in the neighbouring parish of St. Antonius.

When you have a friend...

PULS actually started off as an experiment, which was however to no extent left to chance, since from the very beginning, Director Skawinski searched for professional staff members for all sections of the radio station: First of all, an experienced radio journalist from a state-owned local radio station took over - on the side - the programme management. A bookkeeper checks the finances and accounts. An advertising specialist takes care of customer's advertisements as well as the production of the spots, so that the station is in a position to increase its income month by month.

In addition, to take care of other responsibilities such as the external promotion of the radio station, specialists were recruited in the true Polish tradition: When you have a friend, who has a friend, who has a friend... anything goes.

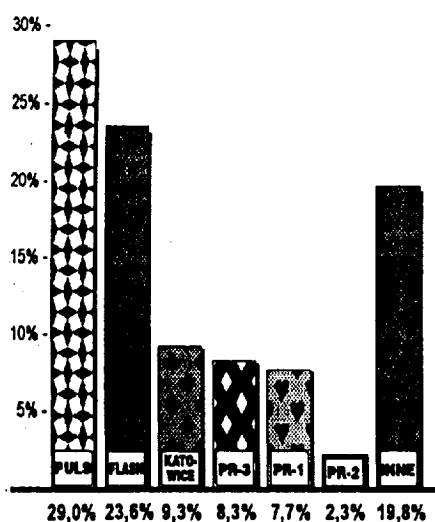
In the meantime, an all-round radio editor in the person of Tomasz Maciejewski has been found, who functions as chief editor and programme director. A special department was created for music, religious and sport programmes, and the news section is - at the same time - responsible for the O and R tones. Altogether, 16 people are employed as regular staff members, seven technicians, seven producers, journalists and reporters, one advertising manager and one book-keeper. Additionally some 30 free-lancers contribute to the programme.

The underlying principle: Only well-trained personnel can be flexible, and this flexibility is, in a young radio station, doubly important: Radio *PULS* arrived fresh on a market where already five other stations (from which two are commercial) were established. To prove itself and to attract listeners, the programmes must be constantly developed. At the same time, the radio station is still so small that some of the employees take over tasks which - in larger establishments - would merit their own special departments.

The No. 1 Radio

The promising personnel policy proved to be a recipe for success: Radio *PULS* climbed to the peak: Presently, more than one-third of the population in the industrial city tune in to Radio *PULS* «predominantly». That means, that *PULS* is now the radio No. 1 in Gliwice. Congratulations! In other towns in Silesia, the

Flexibility through professionalism



Source: *Nowiny Gliwickie*, 26.05.94

daily quota is between 5% - 20%, and this even though the station - with its two 1-kW frequencies - can cover only a part of the region.

Doubled attraction

In Poland - as everywhere in Europe - radio is used almost primarily as a «background medium», i.e. the radio is switched on during breakfast, when travelling in the car or as an accompaniment to the household chores. Above all, music is an important deciding factor whether a special station is tuned in to or not.

PULS chose the so-called music programme format Adult Contemporary. The main target group are listeners between the ages of 25 and 49, an age-group also especially attractive for advertising companies. In some programmes the AC format can be Oldie or current-based, and very often soft music is broadcast interspersed with Gospel, Soul and Blues titles, as well as music from Latin America. Radio *PULS* however repeatedly breaks this habit when perhaps a classical music block is shunted into the programme or a special broadcast for children.

News - talks - music

PULS is striving to improve its image through the quality of information offered. In this category belong firstly the traditional news broadcasts, which are on the air hourly: alternately a five-minute extended version, and headlines of approximately one-minute duration. In addition *PULS* includes the daily news bulletins from BBC International and Radio Vatikan in their programmes.

Important broadcasts concerning political topics, economic reports or election campaigns are also featured. Of course the usual general service broadcasts are included, for instance traffic and weather reports, announcements of cultural events as well as the extra-curricular programme of the Catholic Centre for Adult Education KANA. The majority of the information and listener's service programmes are presented by speakers - who at the same time brace the various programme segments - and spend approximately four hours at one time behind the microphone.

Also in the case of religious contributions, the staff members of *PULS* constantly come up with new ideas, since also here preparation is important. For example the rosary is not just recited over the air, but perhaps a priest together with a child (on the telephone or in the studio) take turns to pray. Meditation contributions are kept short so that they also can be listened to intently.

In addition, a wide range of different magazines is offered, like special programmes for women, for children, about sports or economy. And of course, the question here is once again not which programme is broadcast and for whom, but how. One example: A call-in programme about family life and partnership is arranged by a young married couple. Part of the attractiveness of this broadcast results from the totally different characters of the two persons and their great sense of humour.

Partnership with listeners

One of the fundamental principles for *PULS* is: Always meet the listeners at the same level, and leave the accusing index finger at home. The programmes shall be constructive, consequently counteracting the paralyzing Polish pessimism. Topical is not only that which is new, but above all that which concerns the population in the transmission area. And in this transmission area, the coal-mining region of Upper Silesia, there are approximately 11 million people living. This is a region which bears the scars of many impoverished industrial ventures, of horrendous ecological disasters and increasing unemployment.

Programme format

Information

Religious reporting

Magazines

Programme philosophy

The most important principle of *PULS* remains the consistent listener integration, for example that listeners can telephone-in directly to many programmes, and take part as interviewer, commentator, quiz-candidate, and even as programme co-designer. In this respect it is necessary to know at what time of day people do certain things, and at the same time listen to the respectively designed programmes.

In its programmes, *PULS* attempts to seriously support all aspects in the lives of faithful Christians - more than 90% of the total population - not only in worship and religious service. *PULS* will then ask what are the consequences of Christian faith in everyday life. Part of this is the preservation of the creation, as it is reflected in environmental politics or in the ethics of economy, partnership, social life in the neighbourhood, the town or of fringe groups. This also includes a glance beyond the own national horizon towards the Church in the entire world.

Tribute to filthy lucre

Advertising

Even the most ambitious goals are sometimes only possible by accepting the rules of filthy lucre. The higher the financial resources, the better the chances are of improving the personal and technical capacity and better the quality of the programme. For *PULS* the main source of income is advertising. To attract customers, the new competitor had to offer cheaper prices. But the main strategy of the director of the advertising department was clearly defined: «We have to be simply better than all the other stations.» *PULS* writes the scripts, and produces the advertisement spots itself, which are performed by excellent actors. Propositions for the spots are made, combined with some data about the listenership during different hours of the day and respective prices, depending on the time of transmission. Meanwhile a full team of sales representatives has been recruited, receiving their instructions from the department director himself.

Promotion

Through personal contacts, a marketing specialist was found who, together with the staff, draws up the promotion plan of the radio station. The first steps: the conception of letterheads, posters and stickers. A series of lively jingles was produced, with the purpose of stimulating immediate identification with the programme.

During the forthcoming months the editorial staff and the advertising department will promote cultural festivals in different towns. *PULS* will function as organizer and of course will broadcast live from these events. In the weeks before, some programmes will concentrate on these towns, and of course sales promotion will also be focused on in the different locations.

Never stand still

Further training

The *PULS* editors are given as much time as possible to get acquainted with new subjects such as environmental protection, a topic, which in Poland was almost totally neglected during the past decades.

In addition, and together with the newly established Catholic Centre for Adult Education KANA in Gliwice, *PULS* organises workshops and seminars. The first one in March 1993 focused on the problem of how to create an own special distinctive sound profile. The goal: If a listener turns on radio *PULS*, he or she should recognize immediately which station is on the air, no matter if it is a music programme, the speaker's voice or a pre-produced report. Staff members of other Catholic radio stations in Poland were also invited to attend the workshop. The consultants/experts rank as the best producers in the field of mass communications in Poland. A second seminar will deal with the production of religious topics in broadcasting.

After all, and also in this respect, the name is like the programme: A *PULS* might sometimes be weak. But a standstill would definitely be the cause of death. ■