

Music to Their Furry Ears

Radio and TV execs most often go after the same target markets: adults aged 18 to 49, teenage males, and so on, but some are setting their sights on a mostly overlooked demographic. And it's a big one too, counting 360 million in the U.S. alone. Granted, advertisers won't be impressed by this audience's disposable income (they don't have any), but members of this group are the ultimate loyal listeners who won't ever touch that dial. After all, that's pretty tough without opposable thumbs.

DogCatRadio is a facet of what you might call—although maybe not with a straight face—“pet media.” The station bills itself as “the radio station all pets—and their humans—enjoy!” and broadcasts at www.dogcatradio.com.

Music-loving pets can thank Adrian Martinez, the station's creator, who also owns a record company. “There's two things that mean a lot to me, and one of them is pets, and the other is music,” he says, “and I thought it was about time pets had a radio station of their own.”

The extensive media coverage of that idea has far surpassed Martinez's expectations. “I was completely shocked,” he says. “Because I really thought, okay, maybe we'll get somebody to cover it—a couple of people to say, ‘Okay, this is kind of dumb.’” But a story in the *New York Times*, along with other media exposure, recently helped DogCatRadio reach the milestone of two million listeners.

The station reaches furry ears across the world; about 40 percent of its listeners live outside the U.S., and it's quite popular in Australia and New Zealand, says Martinez, who lives with two canine fans of his own.

As DogCatRadio got the word out, pet owners began to send fan mail—and that sometimes includes photos of pets in Halloween costumes and Christmas outfits, says Martinez. The station receives praise from animals and humans alike (even from the pet-less) and counts vet offices and animal shelters among its listeners.

A brief listen to the station revealed that pets have pretty eclectic tastes—and a certain fondness for '70s and '80s tunes. Listeners who logged on during a recent Thursday afternoon would have heard the theme song from “The Love Boat,” “Sign Your Name Across My Heart” by Terence Trent D'Arby, the Cure's “In Between Days,” and “Touch Me” by the Doors—with a little country and a Spanish pop song for good measure.

Many of the songs the station plays are requests. “People get so crazy and say, ‘Hey, my name is Muffy, and me and my human want to listen to “YMCA,”’” says Martinez. “We just play whatever's upbeat and uplifting.”

The tunes are interspersed with ads and information, including brief tips about bringing home a new kitten and an ad in which “Sparky the Wonder Dog” pitches his CD called “Tails of the City.” “We have some sponsors, not a lot—because we're new,” says Martinez. “It's been pretty much a labor of love, and we're funding it ourselves right now.”

While it's directed at pets listening to the station at home on a comfy couch or cat tree, DogCatRadio doesn't forget those animals without homes. The station has taken part in events organized by rescue groups, and its website links visitors to Last Chance for Animals, Petfinder.com, Best Friends, and other animal organizations. In March, the station auctioned off a “Guest DJ” spot on eBay, with 35 percent of the profits donated to the ASPCA. And that's music to everyone's ears.

—Katina Antoniades

