

Air Checking Your On-Air Fundraisers: How To Do It And Why It Matters

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How prepared are you to air check your on air pitchers?

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Introduction – The Michael Krall Approach

1. Regular, formal and informal conversations with on air talent.
2. Informal conversations work in part because they're informal – not on a schedule.
3. Sometimes they happen right after a shift.
4. The combination of formal and informal is the key.

Jay's Things About Air Checks



1. Review air checks as part of your evaluation of **all** your drives
2. Getting farther away from your pitch breaks allows you to hear them more clearly and critique them more effectively
3. Give the person or people on the airchecks the first shot at a critique to take the tension out of the conversation
4. Critique both radio qualities and fundraising qualities - this means you need to know things about radio and fundraising
5. Collaboration between the PD and the MD
6. Explain **why** in all your feedback

Kelsey's Aircheck Tips

Kelsey's Golden Rule of Airchecks: “**First, do no harm.**” Feedback given insensitively, confusingly, reactively, or in a bad moment can do much more harm than good. Hosts have long memories. “praise publicly, criticize privately” - Valerie Geller

When You Are Live/Tensions Are High: Lead With “Good Job” & Question Your Own Ego. You outlined the perfect break and your talent went rogue for no good reason. Time to lay down the law, right? Or...take a deep breath and consider not just *what* you are going to say, but also *why*. Be open to your pitchers' ideas, nudge people back on track, and save the body slams for when you really need one.

Always aircheck with audio. That way you and your talent can be hearing the same thing at the same time, forming some common ground. Play examples you like, and ones you think could be better.

Explain *how to think* vs tell what to do. Teach your pitchers how to fish instead of throwing fish at them. It takes more investment and patience in the outset, but will pay dividends when your pitchers start thinking like producers.

Use a template, so talent knows what to expect. Having a process can make criticism feel less personal.

Jacque's* Components of a Great Pitch Break



INTRO / CASE / CLOSE / WRAP

INTRO: Invite them in (welcome)

CASE: Appeal to the heart (why)

CLOSE: Inform the brain (how)

WRAP: Put a bow on it (conclusion)

GREAT BREAKS REQUIRE:

- Prep
- Positivity
- Presence
- Passion

One word hosts can't use enough of in a pitch break: YOU

INSTEAD OF THIS	TRY THIS
We bring over 300 artists into Studio 1A	Your support helps us bring over 300 artists to Studio 1A
I've got some [BAND/ARTIST] coming up ...	Coming up, you'll hear [BAND/ARTIST] ...
We just heard music from ...	You just heard music from ...

* partial credit: Nicole Stern of WLRN and public radio legend Valerie Arganbright

Let's Aircheck Together!



Two breaks from KUTX in Austin, featuring host Susan Castle and co-pitcher Jacquie Fuller.

Break 1



Let's Aircheck Together!



Two breaks from KUTX in Austin, featuring host Susan Castle and co-pitcher Jacquie Fuller.

Break 2



Jacquie's On-Air Fundraising Do's and Don'ts

Do

- ... plan your breaks with your co-pitcher
- ... **actually listen to the content and respond to it**
- ... forward-promote upcoming content to keep your listener tuned-in
- ... remember to introduce your co-pitcher
- ... keep your individual pitch to one idea/concept
- ... be conversational (especially in hand-offs) and listen to your co-pitcher
- ... remember that you're talking to *two* people: your co-pitcher and your listener, but ...
- ... speak to only *one* listener to create intimacy (use the word "you" liberally!)
- ... appeal to your listener's heart
- ... stay on message, and bring it back to message when needed ("don't bore us, get to the chorus")
- ... share your passion for the station!
- ... solicit and accept feedback/guidance from Membership and producers
- ... remember that many listeners *want* to give – they're just waiting for us to ask!

Avoid

- "Inside baseball" language or radio-speak (ex: "premium" instead of "thank-you gift.")
- Conversations that don't include the listener
- Talking to multiple listeners at once ("all of you listening right now")
- Hogging the mic
- Desperation
- Negative talk about other stations/media/platforms
- Negative or shameful talk about asking for money
- Cerebral talk, like numbers & data, during your case (heart) message
- Beating yourself up for a less-than-perfect break. It's in the past – figure out what you want to do better next time, and move on!

Jacquie's* Workaround: The Break Workshop

What if you work for a station where airchecking is not practiced or supported? Consider hosting a pre-drive Break Workshop.

1. Collect breaks from *other* stations in your format

- Find out fundraising dates via Greater Public or PRADO
- Record other stations' pitch breaks (using Audio Hijack, screen record, phone, etc. Utilize your interns, or rotate the task among staff)
- Have a producer grab breaks from Skimmer after *your* drive and do a "break trade" with another station

1. Prior to the drive, gather on-air staff for a group listening session and discussion

- Play the breaks, and have hosts write down their thoughts
- Have a group discussion about what what they wrote

Drive Dates	Station	Website	Daypart	Breaks Captured		
				Break 1	Break 2	Break 3
October 5-14	Radio Milwaukee	https://radiomilwauk	morning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
October 7-14	The Current, Mpls / St. Paul	http://thecurrent.org	morning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			afternoon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
October 26 - November 4	KXT Dallas	http://kxt.org/	morning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			afternoon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* Partial credit: David Safar of Minnesota Public Radio, as well as the Iowa Writers' Workshop



KUTX: Listening to Pitch Breaks



Things to listen for ...



- **The hosts make you feel welcome**
 - They mention the station name and introduce their co-host
 - They address you – the listener – in the singular (“you”) instead of the plural (“you all,” “all of you listening out there,” etc.)
- **The hosts keep you engaged**
 - They’re conversational, and don’t sound like they’re reading off a script
 - They avoid inside jargon
 - They appeal to your heart using emotional language, visuals or relatable anecdotes
 - As a listener, you feel included in their conversation, as opposed to feeling like an eavesdropper
- **The hosts are focused**
 - The host and co-host stick mainly to one idea
 - The host and co-host stay on message, and if they veer off-message, they get back on track quickly
 - The call to action is clear
- **The hosts are present**
 - They sound like there’s nowhere else they’d rather be right now than on the radio, talking to you
 - They exhibit the same passion for public radio that they’re asking you to feel





KUTX: Listening to Pitch Breaks



Reflections:



1. Thinking as a **listener**

... what did you like about the break? Was there a moment where you could imagine yourself (as a fan of the station) compelled to donate?

... what didn't you like? Was there a moment when you felt like tuning out?



2. Thinking as a **host**, are there things they did that you found inspiring or worthy of emulating, whether pitching-related or just related to their general style?



3. If you were a **pitch producer**, and these hosts asked you what they could do differently in the next break, what advice would you give them?



Kelsey's Do's & Don'ts

For Producers:

Don't be afraid of the talent - talented people are still just people, and you have the right to do your job.

Don't just show up at pledge time – a good feedback cycle requires lots of trust, and trust comes with regular interactions. Invest in key relationships year-round, not just at pledge drive time, and you're likely to have more influence, leverage and buy-in with your talent.

Do learn how people like to get feedback – sometimes they'll just tell you, sometimes you need to observe what works and what doesn't, there are some people who are simply not coachable and in those cases, redirect the time you'd use on them to other things that might prop up their appearances (incentives, scripts, the other host, etc).

For Pitchers:

Do make eye contact with your pitch partner.

Don't start a thought if you don't know where it's going to end – if you do end up losing the thread, just stop talking. Give the phone number and/or website and toss to your partner.

Do keep a smile in your voice and the proceedings positive... but also: Do tell listeners what you need and what they have the opportunity to do.

Don't give out a million numbers, especially if you want people to remember a phone number (“listen like a listener”). “It's Day 2 of our 5 Day drive and there's \$10,000 left to meet our goal of \$500,000 and there are only 2 hours and 45 min left to meet that goal. Give \$10 a month or join the leadership circle with a donation of \$1000. Or for the next 40 minutes, if you make a one-time gift of \$120 or donate \$10 a month, we'll thank you with 101 Best Classical Symphonies, it's 5 hours of your favorite 6 symphonies, on 4 CDs. Call 1-800-421-1717 now.”

Do create rapport with your pitch partner, but...

Don't talk to your pitch partner more than you're talking to your audience



Classical California Host Trainee Aircheck Template



Overall

What we're looking for: "on brand" – welcoming, friendly, relaxed, "for all"



Vocal Delivery:

What we're looking for: **fluid, conversational**, enunciation, **clarity** & projection, avoid crutches, good pacing, "talking the copy", correct length, avoid wordiness, accurate pronunciation

Content:

What we're looking for: don't be boring, listener benefit (could be educational opportunity), balance of simple to complex intros/outros & amount/type of info, out of place language, concision, memorable, **being "in the day" with listeners & local connection, context, relevance, emotion**, teasing/promoting ahead



Working:

Working:

Working:



Not working:

Not working:

Not Working:



Action Items:

Action Items:

Action Items:

Jay's On Air Fundraising Do's and Don'ts



Do

- Know that your audience turns over every 15–30 minutes so you need to repeat key messages in EVERY break
- Set up / transition into EVERY break
- Talk to ONE listener who listens enough to give but isn't giving right now
- Explain why it's important for that listener to give now -don't assume this listener knows your funding model or why they should give.
- Be smart on air - it's what listeners expect
- Ask the listener to think about why your station matters to them and let it be the reason they give today
- Prepare for every break as if it were any other program
- Treat your pitch breaks as elements within your programs, not departures from them

Don't

- Start a break inside the narrative without setting it up first
- Talk to a group of listeners all at once
- Assume the listener you're talking to knows why they should give
- Tell your listeners you're bad at math
- Talk about all the wonderful stuff your station does
- Say we're taking a break from the show we're listening to



How prepared are you *now* to air check your on air pitchers?

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