A breath of fresh air (waves)

Campus radio stations groove to their own beat

Li Yi, and Capital 95.8FM’s Ong Teck Ming and Carine Ang, for example. It’s not all fun and smooth sailing though. Inevitably, these stations face problems such as a limited audience and lack of equipment.

The SMU Radio Station of the Singapore Management University, for instance, uses computers donated by students and an audio mixer on loan from MediaCorp Radio.

Reality bites

Another problem, said Chua Chee Zi, Chinese department director of Radio Fusion, the campus station of Nanyang Technological University (NTU), is the way its student producers are mostly ignored by concert organisers.

The mainstream media get invited to press events, while we have to ‘invite ourselves’ by writing in,” he said.

There have been times when, in spite of prior arrangements, they turn up to cover events only to be shooed away by press liaisons.

And, it’s not just a problem of producing timely infotainment programmes.

“Much as students want to run it like a commercial station, areas like sponsorship still depend on networking and goodwill,” said R Yoganathan, Radio Heatwave’s lecturer-in-charge.

“Which is why it is important to maintain close ties with the industry, so that students will be given well-rounded exposure,” he added.

Students at SMU Radio Station, for instance, put in hours of hard work, liaising with five record labels to ink promotion deals and get demo albums before the station’s maiden broadcast in January. The companies know we are students, and they were glad to help, even though they told us frankly that campus radio has lesser reach,” said Kevyn Eng, president of SMU Radio’s operator, the Broadcasting and Entertainment Club.

Still, campus stations can be a cost-effective means of reaching out to “a niche market with high spending power”, said Chua.

A handful of companies, however, try to exploit campus stations under the guise of giving students “exposure”.

“Students are not cheap labour, but individuals who are willing to work hard and learn,” said Daryl Epimaco, programme director of the 12-year-old Radio Heatwave of Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

Reality check

On the upside, campus radio stations

Continued on Page 30
Chin Khee Chin, a part-time instructor at Radio Fusion’s Chinese Department.

Deejays who have worked at campus stations agree. YES 93.3 FM’s Tan Li Yi, former host of the Mandarin timebelt of NP’s Radio Heatwave, could select the songs she wanted to play and the topics to talk about on air.

Class 95FM’s Jean Danker, who was Radio Heatwave’s music director when she was a student at Ngee Ann, said the stint prepared her well for work in the radio industry.

“I managed a team of presenters, organised school music events and prepared music playlists while going for lectures and finishing projects,” she said. “That gave me a good first lesson in multitasking.”

And it was at Radio Heatwave that Jean learned her most valuable lesson in deejaying.

“My friend forgot to flip the ‘on-air’ switch in the studio, so she spent two hours talking to herself! This taught me to always check (everything) ... because having dead air is the biggest no-no on radio.”

Current students, too, cherish the opportunity to learn through campus radio.

“A practical platform like this allows us to experience the workings of a radio station and establish contacts with professionals,” said Radio Fusion’s Chua. “Campus stations can play an important role in bringing new voices and ideas into the radio industry.”

The next step? Perhaps campus stations could band together.

Dr David Schaefer, chief coordinator of Radio Fusion, suggests that campus stations here could look to the US where college radio, TV and Internet stations come together under the National Association of College Broadcasters’ umbrella, where student broadcasters share ideas and resources.