SMU campus radio used to broadcast next to a toilet but now they say...

We want to be heard on S’pore’s airwaves

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This campus radio station was born in a sound room with paper-thin walls, next to the toilet. The sound-proofing was so poor that listeners could hear distinct flushing noises while the DJs spoke. That was three years ago.

Today, Singapore Management University (SMU)’s campus radio station broadcasts from a fully-equipped studio on campus, complete with recording equipment, computers and keyboards. And they want hit the mainstream airwaves next.

The radio station is part of Singapore Management University’s Broadcast and Entertainment club, or Smube, which also broadcasts an online TV station.

The club member also provided the cost of setting up the studio but said the university paid for the equipment. It broadcasts online from Smube’s website, www.smube.com. Staff and students – about 5,000 of them – can access the broadcasts via the university’s intranet.

From four-hourly daily broadcast, it’s now on from 10am to 1am.

This is a challenge for the station’s DJs, most of whom have no experience in broadcasting, and who have to spend long hours away from studying recording programmes.

Mr Ng Chee Chey, 26, one of the founding members, said: “Being a management university, we don’t have a constant inflow of mass communication students, and our radio station is a non-compulsory activity.

DYNAMIC STUDENTS

“In spite of that, we’ve managed to find different kinds of students – all dynamic and determined to make this work.”

Mr Terence Koh, 23, Smube’s president, said that DJs go through a rigorous selection process every semester. Each DJ hosts a show, with a different style and focus. Every semester, about 12 shows are broadcast.

One show, “Rock Steady”, plays mainly rock music, while another, “Bras Basah Brothers”, is heavy on Singaporean humour and spoofs.

Aside from those directly involved in producing the broadcasts, Smube deploys its members in specific departments: finance, legal, marketing, public relations and sponsorship, training and development, and welfare and recruitment.

Music apart, local celebrities, visiting academics and top CEOs are also often interviewed. News on campus events are also broadcast.

Although broadcasts are only available through the university’s intranet now, the team hopes that their radio programmes will soon be broadcast through speakers in campus, and eventually on airwaves.

But getting there may be a considerable challenge for local varsities, say industry experts. (See report on right.)

Mr Ng: “We’re still holding on to our vision of eventually making it to mainstream radio.

“We are making progress every day – but for now, we need to make sure that our various teams are in place, so that we can move towards that goal together.”

MDA: Work with broadcasters

MAKING campus broadcasts more widely available poses a challenge.

There are considerable costs involved, including royalties for playing certain songs on air. And a licence is needed from the Media Development Authority (MDA).

Ms Ling Fek Ling, director, media policy, MDA, said that, currently, Singapore does not have any available FM frequencies.

“We encourage local varsities, who wish to broadcast over the airwaves, to consider working with our broadcasters – MediaCorp Radio, SAFRA Radio, SPHUnionworks and Rediffusion – to carry their content on the existing radio services,” she said.

Currently, NUS, NTU and SMU have radio stations which are accessible only through each university’s intranet. This means only staff and students can access it.