

**Results of the latest ABA survey of radio program formats confirms the popularity of music as a programming format in the commercial radio industry, and highlights the resurgence of local production in some regional areas.**

## Survey of commercial radio program formats: 2003

**A**BA research shows the popularity of music as a program format in the commercial radio industry

The ABA has released the results of its third survey of commercial radio program formats. A total of 209 of 276 licensees responded to the 2003 survey, a response rate of 75.7 per cent. The survey covered programming over the sample week from Monday 25 August to Sunday 31 August 2003.

The radio program formats survey was first conducted in February 2001 and will continue over five years, after which the ABA will review the survey. The next survey is expected to start in March 2005. Although the earlier surveys cover the July to June years, the most recent covers the calendar year.

The main trends to emerge from the 2003 survey are summarised below.

### **The popularity of music as a program format**

Music remains the dominant program format across all regions. On average, music programs accounted for more than half of the programming content broadcast on commercial radio (see figure 1). In capital cities, music programs accounted for approximately 47 per cent of total radio broadcast content. In regional areas, the proportion of music programs was higher in the large (61 per cent), medium (56 per cent) and small (65 per cent) regional markets. While the proportion of music programs was lower in the capital cities, these

had more sports and hybrid programs available.

The most popular music category used to describe a station's programming style was 'soft adult contemporary' (35 per cent) followed by 'hot or mainstream adult contemporary' (27 per cent); 'mainstream rock, contemporary rock, top 40' (21 per cent) and 'easy listening, oldies' (16 per cent). Less than one per cent of the survey sample used the 'nostalgia, jazz' category to describe the music programming broadcast by their station (figure 2).

Capital city services produce 96 per cent of their total music programming in-house. Although regional radio services produced a significant proportion of their total music programming in-house, the levels were lower than for capital city services. As a result, syndicated and networked music programs formed a significant component of the music broadcast by large (25 per cent), medium (42 per cent) and small (18 per cent) region services.



### **Radio formats across regions**

Regional radio services broadcast more syndicated and networked programs than capital city services. In 2003, 94 per cent of commercial radio content broadcast by capital city services was produced in-house compared with 67 per cent in regional services.

The proportion of syndicated and networked programs broadcast by regional radio services varied according to the size of the region served. For radio broadcasters in large, medium and small regions, syndicated and networked programming constituted 30, 43 and 24 per cent respectively of their program content.

### **Production of news and information programs**

Commercial radio broadcasters in capital cities and medium-sized regional markets provided similar levels of news programs (figure 2). A review of the source of news programs in medium-sized regional markets shows that the majority of this programming is not produced in-house. Overall, information programs and advertising are broadcast at similar levels across all regions.

### **Increased production by smaller regional licensees**

The proportion of programs produced in-house or sourced through syndication or networking

has, with one exception, remained stable across all regions (over the three surveys from 1999–00 to 2003). In the latest survey, radio broadcasters in the smaller regional markets reported a significant increase in the level of in-house production. A review of the data provided by this sub-group of licensees shows that this increase is due, for the most part, to the reported high level of in-house production of music programs.

Further analysis of the small regional licensees data was conducted to determine the validity of the finding that there has been a significant increase in the level of in-house production since 2000–01. As the current survey results may have been biased by the larger sample, it was decided to reanalyse the data using a matched sample from the last two surveys. This approach effectively eliminates those licensees who responded to the current survey but did not provide a return for the 2000–01 period. This analysis confirmed the earlier finding.

### Survey methodology

The ABA conducts the program formats survey in accordance with one of its primary functions, which is to inform itself on trends in the broadcasting industry and to monitor the operation of the Broadcasting Services Act.

The ABA distributed survey forms to all commercial radio licensees operating during July of each financial year, to complete on a voluntary basis. A copy of the survey form used for this research is available on the ABA's web site at [www.aba.gov.au/forms](http://www.aba.gov.au/forms).

Licensees are given two options for providing survey data. They may draw on data from their station's program records (calculation method) or estimate the data based on their knowledge of the station's program formats (estimation method). Analysis of the method used to provide the survey data shows that only a small proportion of licensees (19 per cent) were able to use a station's program records to complete the survey, with the majority of respondents (70 per cent)

indicating that they relied on the estimation method. The remaining eleven per cent did not provide any information about the source of data used to complete the survey.

To ensure comparability with the previous surveys, the 2003 sample has been divided according to region type: capital city, large, medium and small region. The

capital cities are Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart. Large, medium and small regional areas were defined according to Australian Bureau of Statistics criteria.

The full report is available on the ABA web site, [www.aba.gov.au](http://www.aba.gov.au)

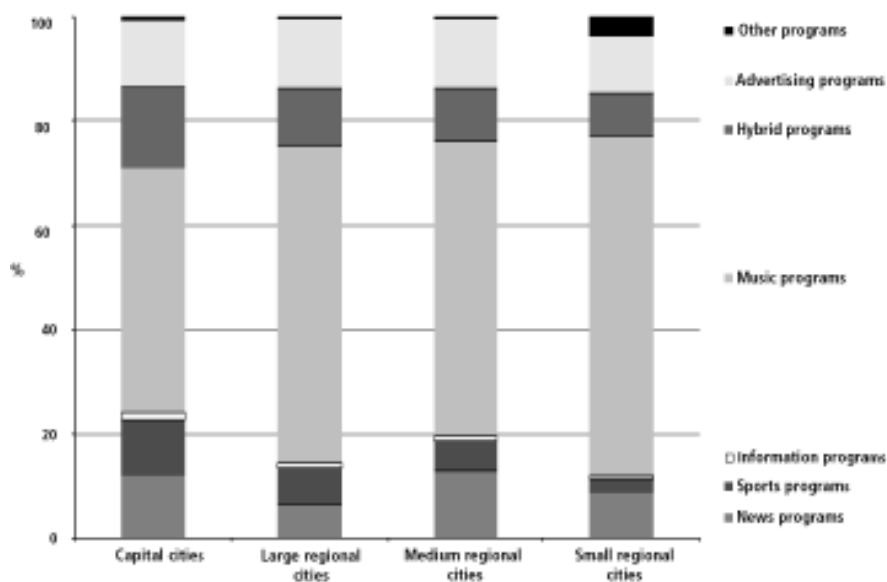


Figure 1 Program formats by region, 2003

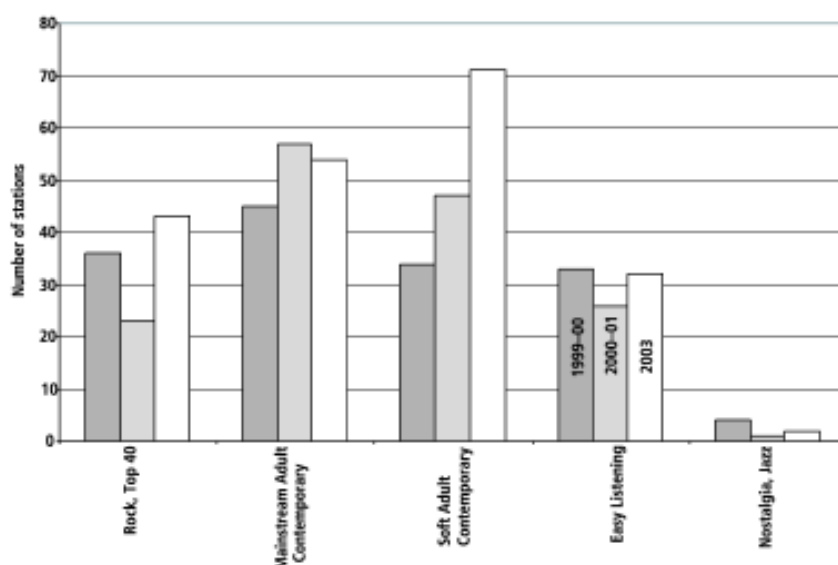


Figure 2 Stations by music category, 1999-00 to 2003