



HITZ arrives in Sydney

HITZ FM arrived in Sydney last month. Transmitting from a studio in Glebe at 96.9 FM until 5 December, it is hoping to repeat the success it enjoyed in Melbourne three years ago, where it resulted in the 'Other FM' category of rating surveys rising from 1.8 to 16.1 amongst 13-17 year olds, and from 3.3 to 12.8 amongst 18-24 year olds (see *CU* 123 p 14).

Legally, HITZ operates as an open narrowcaster. However, as an aspirant community broadcaster operating under the 'temporary transmission' scheme, it must cease transmission after 30 days and wait a further 12 months before seeking to return to air. HITZ must also conform with the characteristics of a community broadcaster. This means that, unlike an open narrowcaster, HITZ cannot operate for profit or carry advertising (but may make limited sponsorship announcements) and must demonstrate a management and program policy that allows for community participation and input. There is no shortage of willing participants: HITZ has attracted 150 volunteers in Sydney after placing advertisements in local dance culture newspapers *3-D World* and *On the Street*. However, the station may need to consider revising its pre-determined and high rotation playlist policy should it proceed to apply for a permanent community licence following the completion of the ABA's Group 4 LAPs (Licence Area Plan) process sometime next year.

HITZ is a hybrid service which exhibits features of different types of services categories created by the Broadcasting Services Act. It is, variously, a community station playing 'alternative mainstream' and attracting sponsorship from McDonalds, and an open narrowcaster competing directly with commercial broadcasters and the JJJ network. The root

cause of this indeterminateness, however, is not the legislation but rather the unquestioning (and possibly unconscious) apprehension of a conceptual nexus between ratings success and commercial character and, underlying this, the assumption that media markets are as much demand-driven as they are supply-driven.

HITZ targets a significant sector of the mainstream audience - youth - that feels unrepresented in the programming formats of commercial stations. The ABA's survey of youth radio audiences, *Music, New Music and all that: Teenage radio in the 90s* (see *CU* 123 p 16), together with audiences ratings figures compiled during the period of HITZ' transmissions in Melbourne, indicates that youth audiences listen to commercial stations in declining numbers and will abandon them if a suitable alternative appears.

HITZ targets a significant sector of the mainstream audience - youth - that feels unrepresented in the programming formats of commercial stations.

If Sydney commercial stations do suffer ratings damage at the hands of HITZ, they are likely to act as their Melbourne counterparts did: wait until HITZ goes away, then hope it never comes back. Such a hope is more likely to be realised with the ABA's reduction of the duration of the transmission period for first time aspirant community broadcasters from 90 to 30 days, which occurred in the wake of the commercial industry's shock at HITZ's unexpected success in Melbourne. In reality, this factor may well deprive any opportunity HITZ may have to develop a critical mass of support necessary to project its Sydney ambitions further. □

Open narrow licences

THE ABA is inviting applications for 84 new open narrowcasting radio services to serve regional areas in the mainland states and the Northern Territory, as well as for an open narrowcasting television service for Darwin. Although open narrowcasters operate under a class licensing scheme, and therefore possess a standing authority to operate a service providing they comply with the licence conditions, aspirants must obtain a transmitter licence from the SMA if they wish to operate in the Broadcasting Services Band. Applications for transmitter licences will be determined by auctions expected to be conducted in December in Sydney. Each licence is for a term of five years with a reserve price of \$4,000. The ABA has made a s 34 determination to make relevant spectrum available for a period of ten years. Although the transmitter licences will expire at the midpoint of this term, the ABA has not decided whether it will re-issue them to the incumbent licensees pursuant to s 100 of the *Radiocommunications Act*, or re-auction them. □

TV auction results

THE ABA has completed its first auctions of commercial television licences in the Darwin and Mildura markets, which are presently served by solus commercial operators largely delivering programming from the Nine Network.

The 1991 Census measured Darwin's commercial television licence area as having a population of 89,425 with a median household income of \$37,706. By comparison, Mildura's commercial television licence area has a population of 54,434 with a median household income of \$22,970. Despite these factors, Telecasters Australia bid \$2.1 million for the Darwin licence and Prime Television (Victoria) Pty Ltd bid \$3.2 million for the Mildura licence. □