

Radio Magnetic – Streamed in to you.
By: Stewart Dalley

Music, like any other part of the arts, ultimately comes down to a question of taste. Some people are going to favour the four to the floor sounds of house whilst others are happiest when their heartstrings are being pulled by a sumptuous aria. It's just the way it is – different strokes for different folks, if you like. While such proclamations might seem like stating the obvious it is a concept that has been universally ignored by Scotland's radio stations. Until now that is.

www.radiomagnetic.com launched on 19th March 2001 and has been slowly building an audience that stations such as Beat 106, Radio Clyde, Radio Scotland and Forth FM would have you believe do not exist. It took almost fifteen years of continued success before Clyde decided dance music wasn't a passing fad and started recruiting specialist DJs. Beat 106, on the other hand, was set-up with the explicit intention of catering for Scotland's clubbing audience; it was also on that basis that they were awarded their licence. Once on air that idea was quickly put aside as they set about specialising in what many term 'schemie music' and with 33 million of Capital Radio's pounds in their pockets it got a whole lot worse. The drum and bass show was ceremoniously dumped; Slam got disillusioned with the station and promptly left. The only thing that remains at Beat 106 that can be considered to be 'in keeping' with their original proposal is the Jengaheads show – just how they've managed to hang on to their slot must have something to do with them knowing where the bodies are buried. But as Radio Magnetic Program Director, Dougal Perman, points out this is all in his favour. "Beat 106 failed to deliver what everyone hoped they would. They didn't provide any platform for underground music. Despite what people say about Capital ruining the station, it was going downhill well before they came on board. Essentially all they've done is pulled them in-line with their structure. By ignoring a massive audience Scottish radio stations have made our job easier because people were so disenchanted by that lack of any alternative radio."

Dougal learned his trade on student radio alongside co-owner of Radio Magnetic, Tom Lousada and it was whilst there that they got a flavour of what radio should be about, as Tom explains. "We'd been involved in student radio and realised the potential the likes of Sub City had in utilising underground dance music in Glasgow. We felt there wasn't a 24hour a day radio station accommodating music that was of a more specialist nature. Although Sub City is great it is a student radio station so you are going to have a less clearly defined remit. We saw a way that we could promote the labels, clubs and DJs that a lot of people in Scotland are into."

Each week clubs such as La Belle Angele, The Arches, The Bongo Club, Glasgow's Art School, Alaska and The Honeycomb fill to capacity with an audience clued-up on underground dance music, in all its forms. Records shops like Fopp, Underground Solu'shn and 23rd Precinct regularly shift huge amounts of units of 'alternative dance'. Similarly our record industry has never been so healthy, with Solemusic, Oh Eye Records and Glasgow Underground all leading the charge for Scotland's underground music scene. But this has all been lost on mainstream radio programmers.

The BBC by its very nature is supposed to take risks and do what other stations can't or won't because they don't have to pander to their advertisers but Radio Scotland is probably one of the worst offenders. Last year they ditched all of their 'youth orientated' programs and cobbled together 'Air' to cover indie and dance music and it's a role they've filled remarkably well. However, the rumour mill tells us that too is up for the chop, which will leave the station with absolutely no youth programming. The reasons for these changes has been brought about by their research that show their main listeners are from the over 35 market. And it would appear that the conclusions they've drawn from this is that anyone over the age of 35 is preparing themselves for retirement and only enjoy listening to jazz, folk and country; a result which has

more to do with the fact that the senior management at Radio Scotland have no market awareness rather than audience feedback. "If you don't market yourself to an audience they aren't going to listen." As Radio Magnetic's Sales & Marketing Manager, Tom Lousada puts it.

With only a small amount of private investment to get them off and running Radio Magnetic has managed to stretch that original investment beyond belief, as Dougal explains. "Our initial projections were that the money would last us about six months but it's lasted us almost eighteen months. We had to quickly become very resourceful, it's something we learned at Sub City that if you don't have money you can't spend it; that mindset has been very useful. We started this just after the whole dot.com thing collapsed, it would have been easier to get money in the height of it but I don't think we would have learned as much."

Having their own systems manager on board, Don MacLellan, has cut down on the cost considerably as too was having the website designed by their friends in Aberdeen's Soulcialist crew. And although they now broadcast from their own, purpose built studio, the ever frugal Radio Magnetic team brokered a deal that saw the first six months of broadcasting come from the studios of Sub City. Traditionally radio pays for itself through advertising but as Sales & Marketing Manager for Radio Magnetic, Tom Lousada, tells us he has had to find other ways of paying for the station's up-keep. "Our approach when speaking to people initially was that we would benefit from having them on board at the start but as we expand it would be more of a collaborative relationship that would be beneficial for all sides. We've found the cheapest ways of doing things without compromising. We've never paid for the backend streaming of the station, or for the allocation of bandwidth. We've looked at doing Beta trials of new software and reciprocal sponsorship deals. Advertising is tricky in today's climate so we wanted to develop the shows and audience first. We are now at a stage where we will be approaching sponsors to attach their name to our product. We are developing other aspects to generate revenue, we have a studio so want to utilise that, we are developing a stream for someone else and developing programs for other people. Although, we will get to a certain stage when we need more money to get it to next level."

Radio Magnetic's policy of mixing different musical styles together for their daytime and through the night shows has won them plaudits from many of their listeners but it was something that had more to do with necessity than design, laughs Dougal. "The idea that music is random came about by accident because we couldn't afford the sophisticated software to put things in genres and it's now become our identity. A lot of what we have learned has been by accident. We want to put all the genres together - a playlist where you are going to get a house tune, then a raga one, then drum and bass. There is a presumption that people only listen to one type of music we want to break that mould."

Currently the roster of DJs presenting shows is enough to get any self-respecting clubber's head in a spin. Hip hop comes courtesy of The Freakmenooovers and Riz, whilst Naeem covers r'n'b. House music is in the mix but in a far less 'banging' style than the mainstream radio stations - people like Bughouse, Homeless and Run a Dub making sure of that. The breaks and beats too get a proper seeing to in the hands of Fenetik, The Operators and Chico, with drum and bass business being managed by the Manga crew and Tania Swift. By having DJs that haven't been moulded into a corporate jock by one of the mainstream stations also makes Radio Magnetic a far less predictable listen and since it is on the Internet it isn't covered by any regulatory body. And you know what that means. A station that actually reflects the society we live in. As Program Director at Radio Magnetic one of Dougal Perman's roles is to ensure that the people they have on-air reflect the overall image of the station "A lot of the people we are working with now have had little or no experience of radio which is quite nice. Although it may take a few weeks for them to find their feet when they do they come across really natural and raw. We are looking for daytime presenters at the moment; they just have to have the right voice."

Being on the Internet also means that their audience is global and that they can archive shows so if the station isn't streaming live what you are into you can download a show for your chosen mood, be that hip hop, house or r'n'b. Having only secured a RSL (restricted service licence) to broadcast on FM in April 2002 the guys are looking forward to the challenges but it doesn't mean that the Holy Grail is FM as Dougal tells us. "We are looking at trying to distribute through cable and satellite at the moment because more people have access to that. We've got big plans for the future doing more outside broadcasts around Scotland. We have set aside a place in our schedule at the weekends that will be used for guest mixes and live broadcasts from clubs. If someone has a broadband Internet connection in their bedroom we have the technology to allow us to broadcast from there. I listened at home through a normal 56K modem and I hooked it up through my hi-fi and it sounds okay but for the station to really succeed in taking people away from mainstream radio everyone has to have an un-metered broadband Internet connection. Because we are on the Internet means we are accessible from anywhere in the world a pal of mine emailed me telling me he was listening to our radio station on his laptop from a beach in Australia, whilst drinking a cold beer. That's how exciting this station is!"

www.radiomagnetic.com