

Moyles effect pays off for Radio One, while Capital FM bounces back to lead commercial sector in London

Stations roll up over breakfast showdown

Radio

by Jim Larkin

The traditional heavy-hitters reasserted themselves at last Thursday's Rajars, with Radio One climbing and Capital FM regaining its dominance in London.

Initial talk following the unveiling of the figures once again focused on the battle of the breakfast time presenters, but the picture was more complex than that, particularly in London, where figures fluctuated more wildly than for some time.

On a nationwide scale, the success story was BBC Radio One. Figures for the three months to June 26 revealed the station's self-styled breakfast time "saviour" Chris Moyles had put on an extra 80,000 listeners compared to the previous quarter and was up 470,000 year-on-year. This helped the station climb above the 10m mark to record its best result in two years with 10.2m listeners tuning in, representing a 500,000 increase against the equivalent period in 2004.

"I'm very happy," said Radio One controller Andy Parfitt, following the announcement. "We've been overhauling the station for the past two years with a focus on creativity and this confirms we've been doing the right thing."

In London, meanwhile, 95.8 Capital FM shot back to number one in share, while maintaining its dominance in reach. The biggest loser, according to the figures, was Chrysalis' Heart 106.2 FM, which lost almost 200,000 listeners in the quarter and whose share declined from 7.0% to 5.0%, dropping it from first to third place among London's commercial stations, behind Capital and Emap's Magic 105.4.

In reality, all three stations lost listeners in the period, but only Capital managed to maintain audience share. Talk quickly turned to the breakfast time slot following recent presenter changes, with Johnny Vaughan heading Capital's offering as a replacement for Chris Tarrant and Jamie Theakston newly introduced as Jono Coleman's replacement at Heart. Both have been backed by huge advertising campaigns.

Theakston's show lost 26% of its listeners compared to the last set of figures for Coleman who had put on an extra 28% in his final full quarter in charge and helped take Heart to the number



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Andy Parfitt, Radio One

one spot in London.

But, sensing the headlines, Chrysalis Radio chief executive Phil Riley was quick to jump to Theakston's defence. "This is not a Jamie story," he said. "We're moving from the old Heart to the new Heart. I can throw these numbers in the bin because they don't reflect what's happened in the recent past here. I'm absolutely convinced it was the right decision to make the change. The next [Rajar results] count a fair bit, but quarter one of next year will be when you can really ask if it was the right decision."

Riley says his instinct tells him Heart is performing better than the figures suggest, claiming the current measurement system is prone to great volatility. He also suggests Magic - which has overtaken it in second place - is not a serious challenger yet. "I take my hat off to Magic for what they've done, but I feel Heart and Capital are neck and neck in London and it will be like that for quite some time," he says.

Meanwhile, Emap managing director of radio programming Mark Story takes a different line. "The figures show that London has become a three-horse race," he says.

Story agrees with Riley that Theakston's figures were inevitable and not a true reflection of the show. But he also believes Magic has made moves to introduce more personality, as a rivalry to Theakston and Vaughan. "At breakfast, Graham Dene's gone up 7% year-on-year. We have added more personalities. We say 'more music, less talk', but when the DJs do say something, it's something that's entertaining, useful or interesting."

At Capital, managing director Keith Pringle was delighted to regain the number one spot in both

share and reach, claiming it was a validation of recent efforts to make the station fresher and more modern. He even believes the loss of listeners is not hugely troubling. He says, "I don't ever want to lose anybody and we'd love to win some back, but what's important for me is that in a world that's fragmenting, we have to have as loyal an audience as we can."

All the debate surrounding the figures was interpreted as a healthy sign by Parfitt. He says, "The interest there is in what's happening in the breakfast show market in London or the rumours over mergers is an active interest and it's exciting. People are spending money advertising their breakfast show and that has to be indicative of a healthy scene."

The BBC's overall share against the commercial sector held relatively stable following recent increases for the Corporation. At Radio Two, the nation's most popular station, listeners were down slightly but figures were healthy. The station's head of talent Lewis Carnie shrugged off criticism the channel was impeding the commercial sector, which has traditionally operated in the 24- to 45-year-old gap between the target audience of Radios One and Two.

"We haven't got an agenda to be big or small, but to deliver as many different genres within our target audience as we can," says Carnie. "There's no more diverse product in the world, probably. But within that we also want to be entertaining. We're very happy and we don't intend changing."

There were a number of success stories among the smaller stations, particularly at GCap's London-based urban station Choice FM, which doubled audience share to 2.6%. "There aren't any other urban stations on the analogue dial," says the station's managing director Graham Bryce. "We've been working on everything from programmes to music and we've also been getting out and doing a lot more in the community and these results validate that."

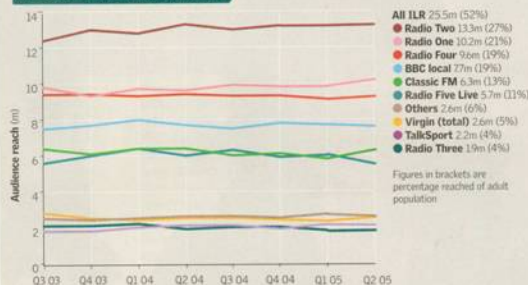
Meanwhile, in Liverpool 107.6 Juice FM enjoyed huge success, increasing share from 3.2% to 7.4% year-on-year. Xfm breakfast host Christian O'Connell achieved his best results yet, but is on his way to Virgin Radio which itself grew listening hours by 12%. It was also a successful Rajar for Classic FM, which grew audience reach by 6% to 6.3m.

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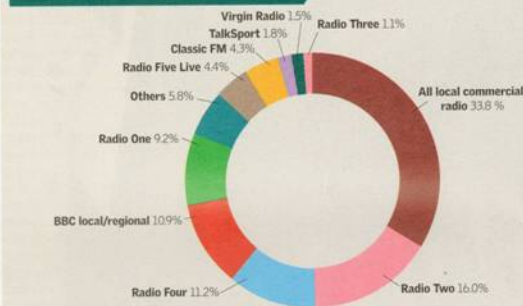
NATIONAL GROUP SHARE
GCap 15.2%
Emap 10.8%
BBC Local 10.5%
Chrysalis 9%

Radio 2005: second-quarter performances

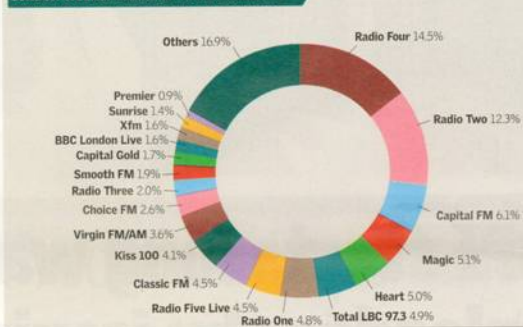
NATIONAL WEEKLY AUDIENCE REACH



NATIONAL WEEKLY SHARE OF TOTAL LISTENING



LONDON WEEKLY SHARE OF TOTAL LISTENING



SOURCE: RAJAR/IPSSO-RSL

107.6
JuiceFM
LIVERPOOL

RAJAR

45% increase in Audience Q on Q
85% increase in Audience Year on Year

Need we say more. Thank you Liverpool!

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*Source Ipsos/rsi Q2:05. Audience defined as total adult hours comparison