

Driving Media Convergence Transformation of Radio Stations through IP Activities: A Case Study of the First Guangma Music Festival (Postprint)

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Abstract

Regarding the transformation of traditional media, both industry and academia have generally focused their attention on the “two micros and one end,” and apart from new media platforms, event platforms—particularly large-scale IP event platforms—constitute another important pathway for the transformation of traditional media. As the executive coordinator of the inaugural Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival, the author begins with an analysis of this event to expound upon the significant importance of creating IP events for traditional media transformation, and points out an implementation pathway that is both enlightening and actionable.

Full Text

Research on Integration and Development: Promoting the Integrated Media Transformation of Radio Stations through IP Events—A Case Study of the First Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival

Abstract: In discussions of traditional media transformation, both industry and academia have generally focused on the “two micros and one end” (Weibo, WeChat, and client apps). However, beyond new media platforms, event platforms—particularly large-scale IP event platforms—represent another critical pathway for traditional media transformation. Drawing from the author’s experience as executive coordinator of the first Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival, this paper analyzes the festival to discuss the significance of developing IP events for traditional media transformation and outlines implementable strategies that offer both inspiration and practical value.

Keywords: IP events; radio broadcasting; integrated media transformation; Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival

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1. Developing Large-Scale IP Events: An Alternative Platform for Traditional Media Transformation

On August 18, 2014, the fourth meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform approved the “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media.” The meeting emphasized the need to advance deep integration across content, channels, platforms, operations, and management. While media convergence has traditionally been understood through the lenses of content and channel development—often focusing on building new media platforms—the reality is that sustainable media development depends fundamentally on operations. Large-scale IP events thus represent a major strategic opportunity for traditional media transformation.

Platform shifts of this nature have clear precedents in other industries. ZhiMei Sports Group, a pioneer and China’s largest operator in the marathon industry, originally served as a CCTV advertising agency. Around 2011, ZhiMei’s leadership astutely recognized that television advertising was approaching an inflection point. With substantial client resources but in need of a new platform, ZhiMei established ZhiMei Events in 2012, becoming the first private enterprise to operate city marathons and successfully channeling client resources into marathon events. This transformation enabled ZhiMei to list on the Hong Kong stock exchange in 2013.

In 2016, amid an overall decline in traditional media advertising, radio advertising demonstrated remarkable resilience. According to CTR Media Intelligence data, traditional media advertising revenue decreased 5.96% year-over-year, while radio advertising was the only medium to achieve positive growth at 2.06%. However, this positive performance should not breed complacency among broadcasters—the Damocles sword of disruption still looms overhead.

Radio’s advertising growth has been largely driven by rising automobile ownership in major Chinese cities. Increasing numbers of private vehicles and worsening urban congestion have created a “rigid demand” for radio among drivers. Yet this foundation is threatened by increasingly accurate real-time traffic information from mapping applications like Baidu Maps and Gaode Maps, coupled with continuously declining mobile data costs. In-car Android systems now enable direct listening to audio platforms such as Ximalaya and Dedao. As these technological trends advance, traditional radio’s decline appears inevitable.

Many broadcasters have anticipated this disruption. Shanghai Oriental Media Group’s Ajimide platform, for instance, aims to construct a new media platform beyond traditional radio. The essence of traditional media transformation lies

in platform shifting—transferring existing program and commercial resources to new platforms. While the industry has focused heavily on developing new media platforms (particularly apps), IP event platforms offer another viable transformation pathway.

On December 11, 2016, Guangzhou Radio and Television’s FM102.7 Guangzhou Auto Music Radio spearheaded the inaugural Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival. As Guangzhou’s first urban music festival and China’s first true marathon music festival, it generated 139,000 Baidu search results and over 3 million online clicks, with more than half of the audience aged 20-35. Leveraging this major IP, the festival’s advertising revenue covered nearly 60% of its costs (typical music festivals require three years to achieve profitability) and attracted advertisers with no prior radio placement history. For example, Speed Horsepower Company, after achieving clear results from its festival advertising, became a long-term hard advertising client in 2017. This demonstrates that large-scale IP events serve not only as a new operational platform for traditional radio stations but also as a growth engine that attracts clients unaccustomed to radio advertising.

2. Identifying an IP Entry Point: “Borrowing a Boat to Sail”

While IP events hold significant potential, how should they be developed? “Creating something from nothing” is fraught with difficulties and carries high failure rates. A more reliable approach is “borrowing a boat to sail”—leveraging existing government resources, contributing strategic value to government activities, and sharing IP ownership.

The inaugural Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival exemplifies this strategy. The 2016 event coincided with the fifth anniversary of the Guangzhou Marathon. Urban marathons have proliferated rapidly across China in recent years, with Chinese Athletics Association data showing over 200 city marathons held in 2016 alone. This “blowout” growth has generated negative press coverage, including incidents such as Qingyuan Marathon runners mistakenly eating soap and high injury rates at Wuhan Marathon. Consequently, highlighting the fifth anniversary Guangzhou Marathon’s unique value presented a practical challenge for Guangzhou’s relevant functional departments.

In April 2016, Guangzhou Radio and Television’s Golden Melody Music Radio submitted a proposal to these departments to launch the first Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival. Drawing on the radio station’s extensive experience in music event production, the proposal suggested incorporating musical elements into the marathon’s fifth anniversary celebration, using music to energize the sporting event and transforming a professional athletics competition into a civic festival—similar to the NFL’s Super Bowl model. The proposal was ultimately adopted by Guangzhou authorities, making the Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival series a focal point for media coverage, with the music stations

becoming featured highlights in CCTV's live broadcast.

3. Integrated Media Execution of Large-Scale IP Events: Boosting New Media Development

The inaugural Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival comprised more than a single music event—it was a comprehensive series with three main components: (1) Guangzhou Marathon Music Stations, held simultaneously with the marathon at five major Guangzhou landmarks along the race route, featuring cheerleading squads and live bands to energize runners; (2) the main festival venue, held after the marathon's conclusion at Guangzhou Radio and Television's new International Media Port outdoor square, running for six hours until 9 PM; and (3) an interactive exhibition area at the main venue showcasing Guangzhou's trendy food brands, sports mini-games, and sponsor displays.

Unlike conventional single events, large-scale IP events require omnimedia, multi-channel reach to effectively access mainstream urban populations.

First, integrated radio and television execution is essential. While most city television and radio stations have merged administratively, they often remain operationally siloed. Large-scale IP events necessitate genuine radio-television collaboration, which in turn facilitates deeper integration between the two media. The inaugural Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival was co-hosted by FM102.7 Guangzhou Golden Melody Music Radio and Guangzhou Competition Channel, with Competition Channel providing promotional video production, Comprehensive Channel supplying news interview resources, and Lifestyle Channel contributing festival performance resources. Only through such radio-television coordination can an IP event achieve sufficient scale and impact.

Second, events must be three-dimensionalized to achieve long-tail audience reach. Although the first Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival can be broadly divided into three components, its execution involved multi-level activities designed to reach audiences through diverse touchpoints. For instance, beginning in September, the "1027 Running Club" organized activities that recruited novice listeners for professional running training and leveraged cooperation with the Guangzhou Marathon operator to offer direct, lottery-free entry to the marathon. During marathon registration, a booth at the Guangzhou Marathon Expo distributed festival tickets to runners, spreading the festival concept to participants nationwide. Beyond the main venue, emphasizing communication impact at every stage represents another key to IP development.

Third, events should drive new media development. As internet demographic dividends diminish, acquiring new followers for new media platforms has become increasingly difficult. Except for top-tier content producers like Luogic Talkshow or Mi Meng, relying solely on quality content to accumulate users is no longer viable. Attracting fans through events and retaining users through activities offers an alternative path beyond ground promotion. The inaugural Guangzhou Marathon Music Festival offered free tickets distributed exclusively through the

FM102.7 Guangzhou Golden Melody Music Radio WeChat public account. One thousand tickets were claimed by fans within 23 seconds, generating 2,000 new followers for the account. Distributing tickets over multiple days could easily have yielded 10,000 new followers. By hosting large-scale IP events, new media platforms can handle functions such as ticket distribution and topic interaction, driving traffic growth through event-based engagement.

4. Conclusion

Traditional radio transformation requires a two-pronged approach: while building new media client terminals, stations must also develop and host large-scale IP events to channel resources into new platforms and promote transformation through event-based initiatives.

City functional departments possess abundant activity resources but specialize in administrative management rather than event planning and execution. Urban radio stations, with their extensive experience in planning and executing large events, offer complementary capabilities that enable shared IP development and mutual benefit.

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