



2.

Programming Causes Audience

“Programming causes audience” is public radio’s shorthand for the direct relationship between the programming decisions we make and the listeners we have. It reminds us that our audience is no accident, and that its size and composition are always under our control.

Programming is a lot like bait. What we catch depends on what we set out. Honey draws bees, worms lure fish, and a hunk of liver will bring stray cats to your door. But the liver won’t do much for the bees or the fish, and the cats won’t come around for honey or worms.

In the same way, certain kinds of listeners are attracted to certain kinds of programming. So when we choose what we air, we select who will listen – and also who won’t.

Of course, listeners aren’t prey, but we do want to capture their attention and loyalty. We can do that best when we understand as much as possible about their interests and qualities.

In this first chapter, AUDIENCE 98 offers key characteristics of public radio’s listeners and demonstrates how different programming causes different audiences.

A Community of Characters

The VALS of Public Radio's Audience

Public radio is like any community: it depends on a core group of citizens to give it life and support.

We've known for some time that listeners with certain characteristics – VALS Actualizers and Fulfilleds – are well represented in our community. Together they form the foundation of our public service and support. **They account for 72% of all listening and over 80% of all listener income.**

Now AUDIENCE 98 adds a third dimension to our understanding:

The confluence of these personality types – a “micro-segment” of Actualizer-Fulfilleds – seems to be at the center of public radio's appeal.

Actualizer-Fulfilleds: Leading Citizens

No more can we say an Actualizer is an Actualizer. In VALS parlance there are two types of Actualizer:

An Actualizer-Fulfilled has the secondary traits of a Fulfilled.

An Actualizer-Other has the secondary traits of some other VALS type.

Actualizer-Fulfilleds are public radio's leading citizens, the heart of our core.

Actualizer-Fulfilleds listen more, give more, and are more likely to have a “sense of community” for public radio than any other listener.

They are served by programming that informs and entertains **educated** listeners. **Seven-in-10 have advanced degrees, and virtually all have graduated from college.**

Actualizer-Fulfilleds amplify the shared characteristics of Actualizers and Fulfilleds, so it's no surprise that their strong sense of civic responsibility makes them the most likely listeners to support their public radio community.

Fully half are current givers, and of these two-thirds contribute at least \$50 per year.

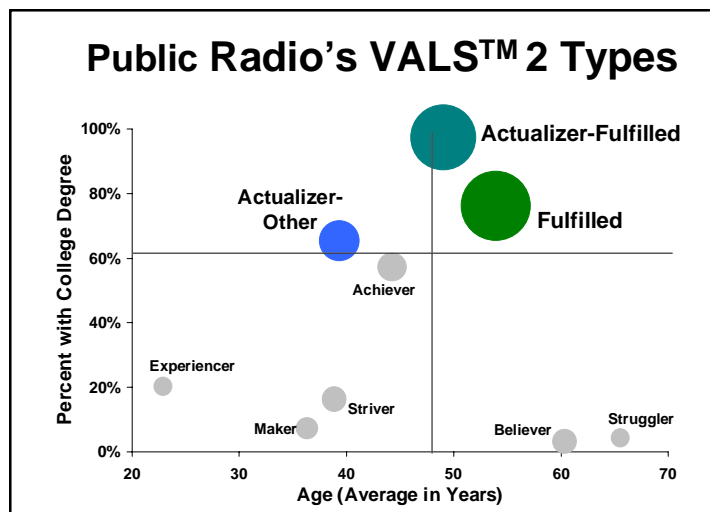
Leading citizens that they are, **Actualizer-Fulfilleds give us two out of every five listener dollars.** They can afford it: These middle-aged listeners (average age: 50) have an average annual household income over \$100,000.

Every time we open a mike, they're one-in-three listening.

The extraordinary educational attainment of public radio's primary VALS types is shown above. The size of each circle represents the amount of listening done by each type of listener. The crosshairs mark the average across the entire public radio system.

Actualizer-Others: Reliable Residents

Public radio's other Actualizers are actually a group of assorted VALS “micro-segments”, all with the primary identification of Actualizer and a variety of secondary types.



Actualizer-Others don't listen as much as Actualizer-Fulfilleds, but **they consider public radio nearly as important in their lives.** These are solid, dependable citizens. They may not frequent the community center as much as Actualizer-Fulfilleds but they certainly appreciate the need for it.

Their strong sense of social commitment leads one-in-three to contribute.

Ten years younger than Actualizer-Fulfilleds, with somewhat fewer resources, Actualizer-Others are still more loyal and responsive than many other listeners.

We don't know for sure, but many seem on their ways to becoming Actualizer-Fulfilleds. Give them a few years to earn their advanced degrees and good salaries and they'll have the resources to move into the Actualizer-Fulfilleds' neighborhoods.

Fulfilleds: Active Community Participants

Although they're **more than three out of every 10 listening** at this moment, Fulfilleds seem to be the least known and appreciated VALS type.

Maybe it's because they're a little older and earn less money than either kind of Actualizer. Maybe it's because their gifts to public radio are smaller. But **one-in-three gives, and their gifts represent almost a third of all listener income.**

Fulfilleds are active participants in public radio's community. **They listen nearly 10 hours a week** – two-and-a-half hours more than listeners outside the dominant VALS types. Half are in our core.

One of their chief characteristics is their lifelong thirst for knowledge; our programming feeds their keen interests in world events, social issues and the arts. **One of their most satisfying pastimes is listening to classical music.**

Many Fulfilleds are retired – which accounts for their smaller incomes. They are public radio's elders – vibrant, involved seniors who lend maturity and balance to our community.

On the Outskirts of Town

The rest of public radio's listeners are scattered among six other VALS types, none of which exceeds 6% of the audience. Together, they do slightly more than a quarter of the listening; one-in-five contributes. But on average they listen less each week than any of the three dominant VALS types.

They live in our community and we'd be poorer without them. But because of their small numbers the force of their personalities is virtually nonexistent.

– Leslie Peters
– Jay Youngclaus
– David Giovannoni

A Community of Characters

Comparing VALS Types

The differences among these segments of society are in sharp focus when viewed through the lens of our Stairway to Given.

Actualizer-Fulfilleds know the route best.

– Jay Youngclaus

Public radio's three prevailing VALS types are the most likely to travel up the Stairway.

Note: *The Stairway to Given is explained in detail on pages 115-116.*

Stairway to Given

(For most-listened-to Public Radio Station)

		Actualizer-Fulfilled	Actualizer-Other	Fulfilled	Others
	Percent of Listeners	24	11	30	36
	Percent of Listening	29	11	32	28
	Percent of Givers	35	11	32	22
	Percent of Giving	39	13	30	19
Steps 1&2 Reliance on Public Radio	Percent in Core	61	48	51	36
	Loyalty	51	38	42	30
	Years Listening to Station	11	8	11	8
	Percent with "Strong" Reliance on Public Radio	61	47	50	33
	Percent who listen both Weekdays and Weekends	62	50	57	42
	Occasions (per week)	10	8	8	6
	TSL (HR:MN per week)	10:54	9:34	9:48	7:14
Step 3 Personal Importance	Percent who agree Public Radio Station is Personally Important	94	92	91	83
	Percent with "Strong" Sense of Community	72	65	58	40
Step 4 Funding Beliefs	Percent with Beliefs Associated with Giving to Public Radio	36	35	37	34
Step 5 Ability to Afford	Average Annual Household Income	\$102,000	\$74,000	\$58,000	\$41,000

A Community of Characters

Fulfilled's Other Flavor

Just as public radio's Actualizers come in two flavors, so do public radio's Fulfilled listeners.

Close kin to Actualizer-Fulfilleds are Fulfilled-Actualizers, a VALS micro-segment similar in age, beliefs and interests — but with fewer resources.

While Fulfilled-Others are likely to be older, primarily classical music listeners,

any broad characterization of Fulfilleds as 60+ classical music listeners who avoid news would be wrong.

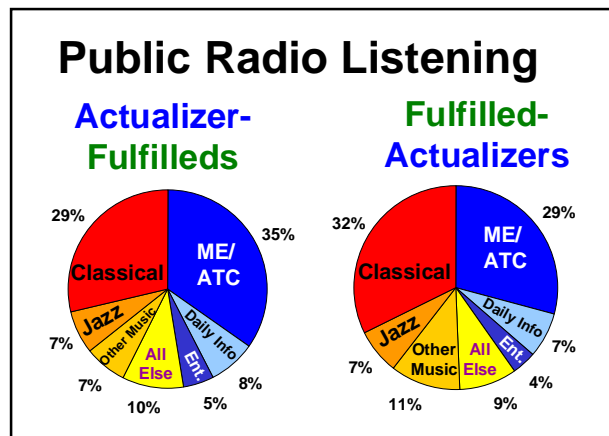
In fact, the listening choices of both Actualizer-Fulfilleds and Fulfilled-Actualizers are virtually identical: **They each spend about a third of their public radio listening time to NPR newsmagazines, and about a third listening to classical music.**

Fulfilled-Actualizers are less apt to have advanced degrees than Actualizer-Fulfilleds; they also earn a little less. But in the ways that count to public radio — listening and giving behavior — they are more like Actualizer-Fulfilleds than they are like Fulfilled-Others.

Confused? Don't be.

VALS is more nuanced than it first appears, but that's also the source of its great value. Understanding that two respective flavors of Actualizer and Fulfilled share the nexus of public radio's appeal is a powerful piece of knowledge.

AUDIENCE 98's data about public radio's important VALS segments can help focus programming and fundraising efforts more effectively. The more detailed the information, the sharper the focus — and the more it can help.



— Leslie Peters

A Community of Characters

Appeal, Affinity, And Other Programming Considerations

Every minute of radio programming offers an attraction for a certain type of person. This attraction – the quality that brings listeners to it – is called **appeal**.

People listen to programming because it appeals to them. They choose one station over others because it is the most appealing at that time.

As a verb, to appeal means to provide a service that attracts certain types of listeners more than others; as a noun, appeal is the intangible attribute of the service that attracts these listeners.

The appeal of a program is inseparable from those who listen. The program creates the audience, and the characteristics of that audience define the program's appeal.

Programs that serve very similar audiences – i.e., programs with highly congruent appeals – work better in combination. The degree to which the appeals are congruent is called **affinity**.

Programs that serve the same audiences have high affinity. Programs that serve moderately different audiences have only moderate affinity. Programs that serve different audiences have no affinity.

Appeal and affinity can inform the decisions of programmers faced with many programming options. This knowledge can lead to improved public service.

Program Type

A common mistake is to equate appeal with a program's type or genre: talk or music, news or entertainment, serious or whimsical, jazz or classical.

Program type and appeal are not the same. A program's appeal, and subsequently its affinity with other programs, is determined by the qualities of listeners it attracts, not the type or

genre of the program itself.

There's no guarantee that any two programs of the same type or genre will have high affinity and work well together. Indeed, the appeals of programs **of the same type** can differ dramatically.

This is evident even at public radio's "all news" and "all classical" stations, where programs that are "in format" don't serve core listeners as well as other programs. The example from AUDIENCE 88 was opera – one type of classical music with precious little affinity with most other classical music.

Similarly, programs of wildly different types attract and serve the same people. *A Prairie Home Companion* and *Car Talk* entertain the NPR news audience; their appeals are the same as *Morning Edition's* and *All Things Considered's*.

Variety

In the study of appeal and affinity, it's critical to distinguish between two types of variety.

Program variety is the contrast in the types of programming on a station. *All Things Considered*, *Marketplace*, and *Car Talk* are different programs; they offer programmatic variety.

Audience variety is the contrast in the types of **persons** served by each type of programming on a station. Programs that appeal to younger persons are different than those that appeal to older persons.

Program variety has to do with program type or genre. **Audience variety** has to do with the types of listeners caused by various programs.

Audience variety weakens a station's public service. Changing focus for short periods of time results in serving few, if any, listeners.

Program variety can enhance public service.

Indeed, the more program variety a person hears on a public station, the more value he places on the service; the more important it is in his life; the more likely he is to support the station.

However, **program variety is often at odds with consistency of appeal.** Program variety contributes to public service **only when varied programs appeal to the same listeners.**

This suggests a hierarchy of scheduling strategies.

- High affinity (consistent and congruent appeal) among diverse program types constitutes a highly effective and highly valued service.
- High affinity without program variety also constitutes a highly effective service, but one that is less valued.
- Low affinity among programs offers the weakest public service, regardless of any consistency among program types.

Power

A program's **power** is its ability to draw listeners to the station. It is a measure of quantity, of strength.

Appeal is a **quality**, not a quantity. It tells **who** is listening, not **how many** are listening. It is not a measure of strength.

Even when two programs have identical appeals and therefore perfect affinity, the power of each may not necessarily be equal. One may exert a stronger draw than the other; if so, it has more power.

Assorted statistics reflect various facets of power. Cume rating indicates the force with which a station reaches into the population; share shows the strength with which it competes in the market; and loyalty is its ability to serve its own cume.

Together, appeal, affinity, and power determine the composition and size of the audience that is – or that may be – served by a combination of programming options. As such, they inform decisions that can lead to stronger public service.

– David Giovannoni

A Community of Characters

The Psychographic Consequences of Station Format

*And you may ask yourself —
Well...how did I get here?
— David Byrne*

Sometimes station managers make truly strategic format decisions. Now that we have VALS information from AUDIENCE 98, we can clearly see the **psychographic consequences** of certain decisions.

Several years ago San Francisco's KQED dropped classical music to go all news, while KUSC in Los Angeles quit NPR for all classical. Philadelphia's WXPN made a more unusual move towards adult alternative music.

Those decisions were made on the basis of market competition, demographic targeting, and rough projections of the potential for listener support. VALS did not enter into the equation; nonetheless VALS figures significantly in the results.

Psychographic Territory

The chart shows the VALS AQH composition of the audiences for 30 public radio stations. The horizontal axis is the contribution to aver-

age audience by listeners whose primary VALS type is Actualizer. The vertical axis is the composition by primary Fulfilleds.

Reading The Chart

- At the top of the chart is KUSC with psychographic coordinates at 56% Fulfilleds and 27% Actualizers.
- Stations like KUSC in the upper left quadrant appeal to Fulfilleds more than Actualizers.

Directly opposite KUSC is WXPN with psychographic coordinates at 16% Fulfilleds and 55% Actualizers.

- Stations like WXPN in the lower right quadrant appeal to Actualizers more than Fulfilleds.

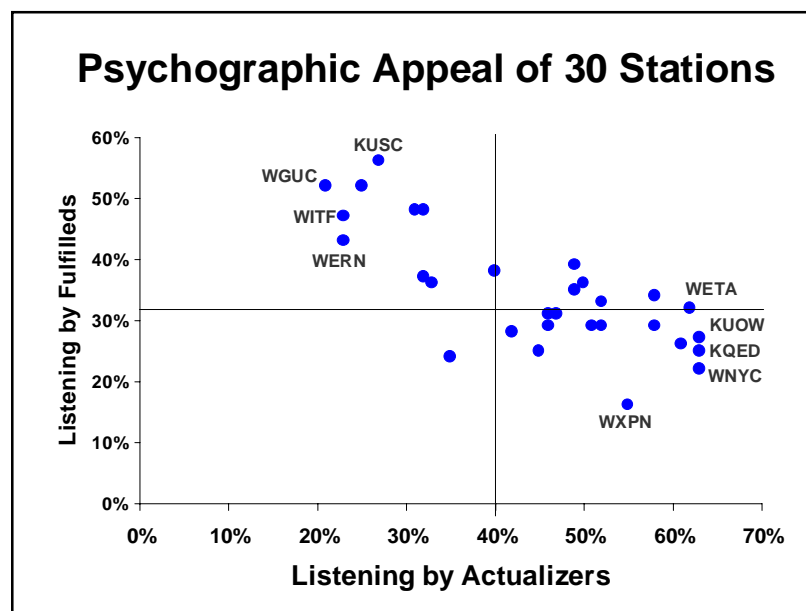
To show the relationship between programming and psychographic appeal, we identified a few outlying cases:

High Fulfilleds/Low Actualizers

KUSC	56% - 27%
WGUC	52% - 21%
WITF	47% - 23%

Low Fulfilleds/High Actualizers

KQED	25% - 63%
KUOW	27% - 63%
WNYC	22% - 63%



Going All News

It was not the motive at the time, but stations that focused mostly on news – KUOW, KQED, WBUR, WHYH – were really focusing mostly on Actualizers. By emphasizing network news and information, they effectively narrowed their psychographic appeal.

You may be surprised to see that WXPN did the same. Blowing off the Fulfilleds, WXPN plays contemporary music for Actualizers.

Going All Classical

KUSC's mostly classical format really attracts the Fulfilleds. But aside from *Marketplace* and Garrison Keillor, there's not much in the format for Actualizers.

WGUC carries *All Things Considered* but not *Morning Edition*. The station has a strong heritage in classical music.

Mixed Formats

What about WERN in Madison, WETA in our nation's capital, and WNYC-FM in New York? Each offers a mix of news, entertainment, and classical music.

Heritage commercial classical stations offer Fulfilleds another place to go in both the New York and Washington markets. In Madison there is no classical competition, which is why WERN has a higher level of Fulfilleds than WETA or WNYC.

A larger concentration of Fulfilleds requires, by definition, a smaller concentration of Actualizers.

Among the system's major stations, WETA and WNYC have the highest concentrations of Actualizer-Fulfilleds – public radio's key VALS micro-segment. This suggests that a mix of programs and formats can serve an Actualizer-Fulfilled audience.

Zoom In – Zoom Out

Of course, if you want to see the psychographic positioning of public radio stations from the larger perspective of commercial radio, stick this chart on the wall and back up about 100 feet. All of the data points will converge into one fuzzy mark at the center.

The distances between public stations would become insignificant on a map of commercial radio formats like country, rap, hard rock or CHR. They drive away the Actualizers and Fulfilleds while serving listeners in the other six (less educated) VALS types.

Where Do You Want To Be?

Given the attractive economics of station consolidation, public station managers have tended to think in terms of a news and information station linked to an all-classical.

Imagine two consolidated stations that would be targeted psychographically – one aimed at Actualizers, the other Fulfilleds.

Car Talk, for example, would go on the Actualizer channel along with some appropriate music, perhaps like WXPN's.

Certain informational programs appealing to Fulfilleds, who read avidly to gain knowledge, could fit on the other channel along with classical music.

The **macro**-formatics of program selection aren't the only way to determine appeal. PDs who actively manage their staffs make equally consequential decisions each day on the **micro**-formatic level. Programming causes audience – even if we're only talking about adding a track into rotation or giving direction to a newscaster.

While the psychographic consequences of the stations charted here resulted from format decisions, understanding public radio's dominant VALS types and their programming preferences can give managers and programmers more precise control when deciding where they want to be and whom they want to serve.

– Dr. George Bailey

A Community of Characters

Format Flavors

National programs sound essentially the same no matter what station they're on. Their appeal is constant across stations.

This is not the case with locally produced programs. It is futile to talk about the appeal of "local jazz" or "local classical" when the same genre appeals to an older audience on one station, a younger audience on another, a racially diverse audience on another, and so forth.

There are, in fact, many "flavors" of local jazz and classical programming. For this analysis we have chosen two classical and two jazz flavors based on the VALS2 characteristics of their local audiences.

- **Upstairs Classical** attracts very high concentrations of Actualizer-Fulfilleds (38%) and listeners with advanced college degrees (38%).
- **Downstairs Classical**, in comparison, attracts lower concentrations of these listeners (although at 16% of this VALS type, and 21% with advanced degrees, it is still quite distinct from the American population).
- **Uptown Jazz** is between Upstairs and Downstairs Classical in its attraction to Actualizer-Fulfilleds (30% are of this VALS type and 28% have advanced degrees).
- **Downtown Jazz** attracts very low concentrations of Actualizer-Fulfilleds by public radio standards. Still, at nine percent, this VALS type is more than twice as prevalent in this audience as in the U.S. population.

These names convey no value judgments on the formats or audiences, nor do they reflect music selections or presentation styles. They simply describe format flavors having certain

Up/Down attributes.

What do these flavors sound like? There's no simple answer, other than to listen for clues at the stations that produce them.

Why VALS?

Public radio is off the charts in its appeal to the VALS Actualizer-Fulfilled micro-segment. At the nexus of the Actualizer and Fulfilled personalities, this listener's values and principles strongly reflect the inherent appeal of public radio's programming; they are what set public radio apart.

Actualizer-Fulfilleds seek weekday news programs and several weekend news and entertainment shows. These programs have high affinity with Upstairs Classical, because it too attracts high concentrations of Actualizer-Fulfilleds.

Programmers who move their local classical from Downstairs to Upstairs have a better chance of becoming valued services to these listeners.

The affinities of Uptown Jazz run highest with weekend entertainment shows.

Programmers who air both will have a more difficult time finding national programming with which to anchor the weekdays, as very little else on public radio currently shares the appeal of Uptown Jazz.

The Downtown Jazz audience is so distinct that no other major programming on public radio appeals to it.

Programmers who serve this audience have only each other to turn to for programmatic support.

– David Giovannoni

Technical note: *The number of retirees, eggheads, or other populations under a station's signal can sway the reported flavor of its music. So can the audience brought to the music by other programming on the station. The full mathematical complexity of these issues is treated in the "Radio Intelligence" anthology. The simpler intent here is to apply the VALS typology to advance the concepts of appeal and affinity.*

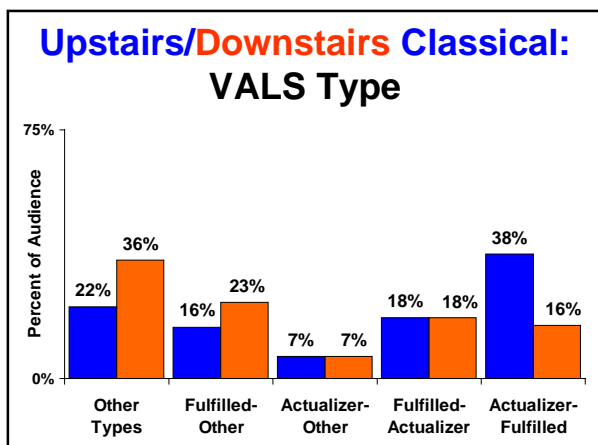
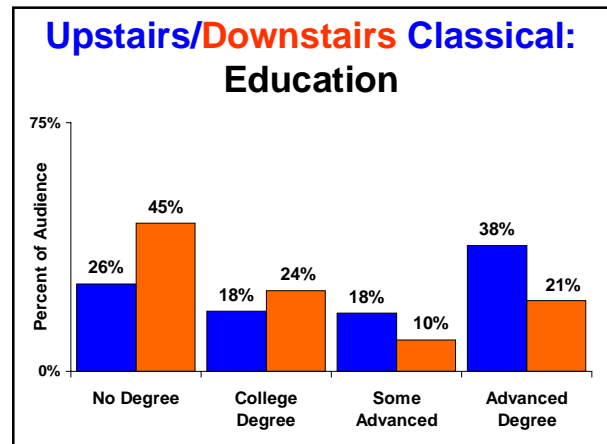
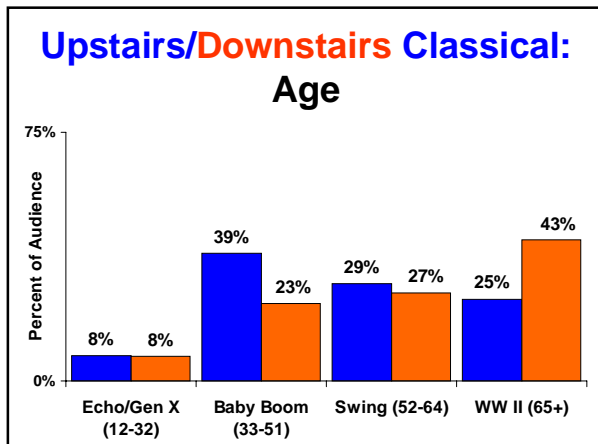
WAMC, WBAA, WCVE, WDAV, WETA, WEVO, WHRO, WKAR, WKNO, WLTR, WMFE, WMHT, WNED, WNYC, WOI, WOSU, WPNE, WRKF, WSHU, WTEB, WUNC, WUOT, WVIA, WVPR, WVTF, WWFM.

Downstairs Classical

The right bars on the graphs below show the appeal of Downstairs Classical. The local classical programming on these stations defines the flavor: KANU, KBAQ, KBYU, KCSC, KHCC, KNPR, KPAC, KSJN, KUAT, KUOP, KVNO, WABE, WAUS, WBJC, WCAL, WCNY, WERN, WFCR, WFDD, WGBH, WGTE, WGUC, WILL, WITF, WKSU, WMEA, WMNR, WMPN, WMUK, WPKT, WPLN, WQCS, WQED, WSCL, WSFP, WSMC, WUFT, WUSF, WWNO, WXXI.

Upstairs Classical

The left bars on the graphs below show the appeal of Upstairs Classical. The local classical programming on these stations defines the flavor: KBPS, KCFR, KUHF, KUSC, KVPR, KWAX, KXPR,

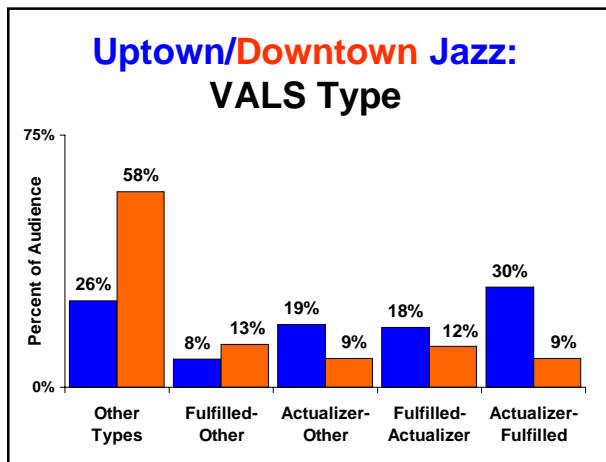
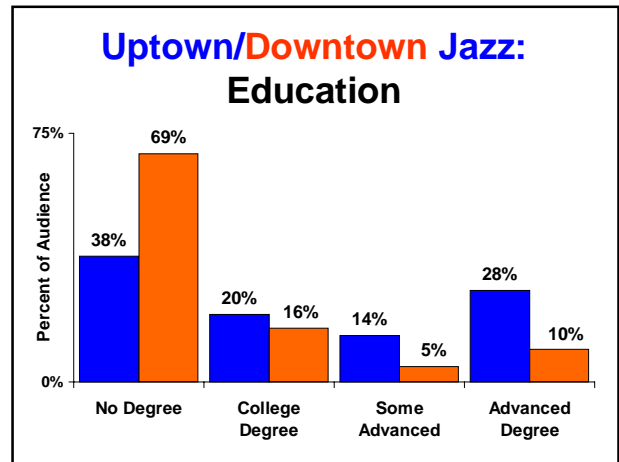
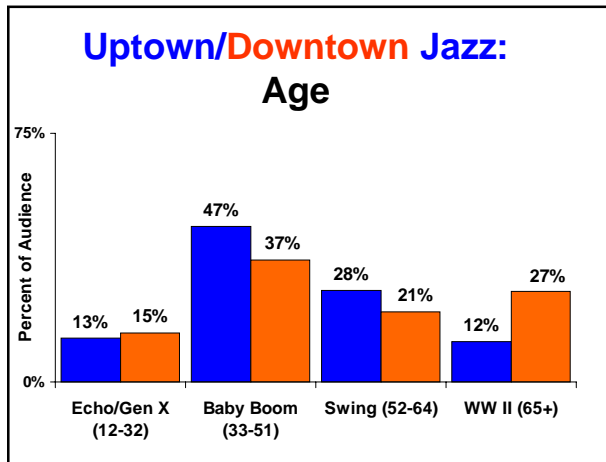


Uptown Jazz

The left bars on the graphs below show the appeal of Uptown Jazz. The local jazz programming on these stations defines the flavor: KBEM, KCSM, KLON, KMHD, KPLU, KUVU, KXJZ, WCVE, WDET, WGBH, WJAB, WWOZ.

Downtown Jazz

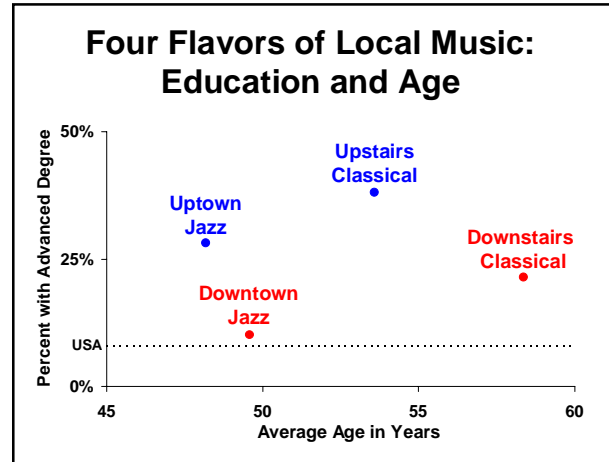
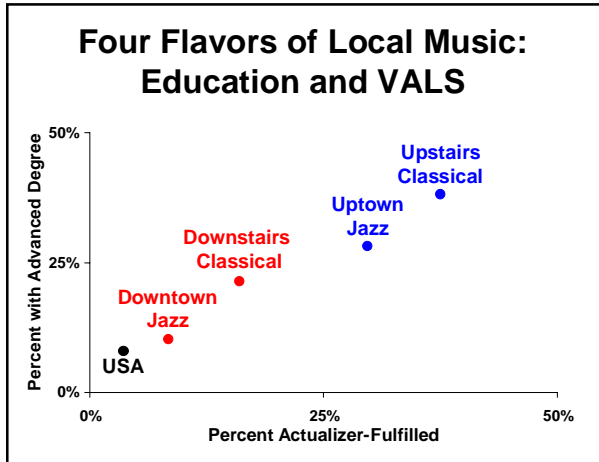
The right bars on the graphs below show the appeal of Downtown Jazz. The local jazz programming on these stations defines the flavor: WBEZ, WBGO, WBRH, WDUQ, WLRN, WRTI, WSIE.



This graph shows the relationship among **Upstairs/Downstairs Classical** and **Uptown/Downtown Jazz** with regard to their listeners' education and VALS type, compared to the U.S. population.

This graph shows the relationship among **Upstairs/Downstairs Classical** and **Uptown/Downtown Jazz** with regard to their listeners' education and age, compared to the U.S. population.

– Jay Youngclaus



A Community of Characters

Appeal & Affinity Basics

Appeal

Every radio program is like a magnet. It attracts certain types of people and leaves others unmoved; it may even repulse some.

This attraction is called **appeal**, and like magnetism we can't see it directly – we can only see its effects.

We characterize a program's appeal by the type of people drawn to it. For instance, a program that attracts older listeners has an "older" appeal that's qualitatively different from a program with a "younger" appeal.

Discrete programs have appeal. Format blocks have appeal. Indeed, stations have appeal. In every case, appeal is characterized by the qualities of the listeners who are attracted.

Affinity

Affinity is the degree to which two appeals match. It can be high, non-existent, or somewhere in between.

Programs with extremely similar audiences – that is, with the same appeal – have high affinity. Conversely, programs that appeal to very different types of listeners have no affinity.

Similarly, a program's appeal can be compared to a station's appeal to yield the affinity between the pair – in other words, the degree to which the two audiences will mesh.

The degree of affinity informs the appropriateness of a program decision.

Programs with no affinity serve different audi-

ences and don't work well together. Programs with no affinity with a station's audience do not contribute to the station's public service.

Public Service

Radio stations serve the public best when they focus their appeal on a certain type of listener.

It's the privilege of the licensee and management to choose that listener. But once chosen, the greatest public service focuses like a laser to meet his needs and interests, and the needs and interests of people like him.

Commercial stations focus on the age, sex, and sometimes race of the listener. Public stations typically operate in a fourth dimension of education: their listeners are often the most highly educated in town.

Resolution

Our assessment of appeal is only as fine as the lenses through which we view listeners. Sex, age, and race are usually sufficient to resolve differences in appeals.

AUDIENCE 98 adds the high resolution lenses of education and VALS2. Do programs that look the same under the sex/age/race lens look different when the educational attainment or VALS of their audiences are viewed?

Powerful before, our lens can now resolve even finer traits. The sharply detailed audience portraits that result inform even more appropriate and powerful programming decisions.

– David Giovannoni

A Community of Characters

VALS Notes

Where Are the Soc-Cons?

When AUDIENCE 88 first used VALS to describe our audience 10 years ago, the most prominent listener type to emerge was the Inner-Directed, intellectually curious, iconoclastic, Societally Conscious “Soc-Con.” A secondary group of Outer-Directed, success-driven, status quo defending Achievers was also prevalent.

The VALS of today is actually VALS2, a more market-driven version of the original VALS. Under the new system our prevalent listener personalities are Actualizers and Fulfilleds. Soc-Cons are gone, and today’s Achievers are so substantially redefined that we don’t find many in our audience.

Dual Personalities

Though we’re accustomed to referring to VALS types by one of the eight major category names, everyone has a “dual personality.” It’s a combination of two VALS types – a primary identity modified by a secondary designation. VALS calls this a “micro-segment.” (The primary type alone is called a “macro-segment.”)

While the traits described in each VALS macro-segment are **likely** characteristics of anyone in that category, all may not apply. Micro-segments acknowledge that human beings are far more complex than any single VALS category can report.

One-quarter of our listeners are Actualizer-Fulfilleds – that is, Actualizers with Fulfilled characteristics. In such a combination, the qualities and values shared by Actualizers and Fulfilleds are amplified. For example, social responsibility is a key trait for both. Actualizer-Fulfilleds are

more likely to be committed to social causes than Actualizers with another secondary designation.

Why Use VALS?

The more we know about listeners the better we can serve them, and the more likely we are to earn their loyalty and support.

That’s why VALS is such a powerful tool. It gets us inside listeners’ heads for a look at the values and beliefs that motivate them.

VALS explains why people act as they do as consumers and as social beings. Unlike other segmentation schemes organized by geography, age, or other demographics, VALS is based on human psychology. That’s what makes it powerful.

For instance, as programmers, producers, development professionals, and promotion specialists we craft messages to draw particular responses from listeners. Understanding how they perceive themselves and their world helps us choose the programming, the words, and the appeals that can accomplish our ends more effectively.

Ours to Lose

VALS micro-segments are most useful in “niche” or highly competitive markets such as radio. Indeed, public radio **owns** the Actualizer-Fulfilled radio market.

This micro-segment represents only four percent of the US adult population. But **every day public radio is heard by one-quarter – each week by over one-half – of all Actualizer-Fulfilleds in America.**

What's Your Sign?

Your beliefs about public radio have attracted you to it, just as they have attracted our listeners. You are quite likely an Actualizer, a Fulfilled, or even an Actualizer-Fulfilled if you work in public radio.

You can find out for sure by completing the VALS questionnaire on the Internet at <http://www.future.sri.com>.

It's short, quick, and free.

– Leslie Peters

A Community of Characters

Operative Affinity

The audiences for urban country and NPR news share similar sex, age, and race appeals. Affinity seems high based on these three facets alone.

But examine another facet – education – and the affinity plummets. In this case the education lens reveals the largest difference in appeal; education is the affinity that is most operative.

Operative affinity is the lowest affinity score among all of those calculated. It is our best guess at the true affinity.

Think of it this way: the more lenses we have to look through, the better able we are to see meaningful differences between audiences.

Unfortunately, lenses are not free. AUDIENCE 98 is able to add education and VALS2 to our arsenal of lenses, but one time only. Are they worth it? Should we buy them again in the future?

Let's take each in turn and see how it adds to our ability to improve upon our affinity scores.

Education and VALS

The age, sex, and race of listeners come bundled in Arbitron's basic package of listening data. Recently Arbitron began measuring the educational attainment of listeners. And it's something we should pursue, because **education determines the operative affinity among major programs more than half of the time.**

Gathering VALS information on each listener is an expensive process, requiring a special survey that asks each listener several dozen questions.

VALS does improve the accuracy of our affinity

estimates – but not nearly as often or as much as education.

How We Know This

We know this because we examined the numbers for all major national program combinations tracked by AUDIENCE 98.

We use as baseline affinities those based on age, sex, and race alone. When we add the education lens, we get better affinity estimates 62 percent of the time – very significant improvement.

When the VALS lens is added on top of this, the affinity estimates improve 21 percent of the time. However, most improvements are small, with only five percent changing the category of affinity at all – typically from “very high” to “high”.

These nuances revealed by the VALS lens may be useful, but are they worth it?

Refining Appeal & Affinity Tools

We ask in order to determine how precise our tools need to be in the future, and how much they need to cost.

It is clearly worth pursuing the education data now gathered by Arbitron for ongoing assessments of appeal and affinity.

VALS is another matter. Although it has many potentially powerful applications in public radio, refining affinity estimates does not seem to be one of them. Given its expense, we can continue to compare the appeals of public radio programs quite well without it.

– David Giovannoni

Evaluating VALS

VALS is an enormously useful tool for public radio. It's our chief source of psychological information about our listeners, and the most comprehensive system we have that details their values and interests.

VALS is part of public radio's two major audience research projects – AUDIENCE 88 and AUDIENCE 98. For most in the industry, these two studies have been the only means of accessing VALS – an expensive product that most stations can't afford.

In that way, VALS is analogous to the Arbitron data that were also, at one time, priced beyond the reach of public radio. Not until CPB and later the Radio Research Consortium brokered an affordable deal with Arbitron did public radio know if **anyone** was listening, much less whom.

Though some once thought otherwise, public radio could not have flourished without Arbitron information. Unless we know how we're doing in the most basic way – who's listening – we can't possibly begin to understand how to improve our service.

Yet Arbitron's ratings were invented to sell advertising for its main clients – buyers and sellers of commercial radio time. Public radio's business is public service.

That's why many in our industry look at Arbitron data through a public service lens, using concepts like "loyalty" that appear only in tools created specifically for public radio. Many would agree that the creation of these tools was as important a development for the industry as the Arbitron deal itself.

Public radio could benefit in the same way from **specific public radio applications of VALS**, a sales product also created for commercial clients.

Unlike Arbitron, VALS doesn't gather new information every quarter. It's a system of concepts that doesn't change much over time. Through AUDIENCE 98, CPB is making the current VALS system available to public radio. And AUDIENCE 98, through its findings about VALS and our listeners, already supplies the public radio lens.

Today our industry has a powerful database, ripe with possibilities for VALS-based public radio applications. Though the VALS vendor would gladly sell its array of VALS-based products to us, public radio is too small a market for it to create the special tools that could serve us best. For example:

- Creating and testing a variety of targeted VALS-derived fundraising messages that not only raise money but also reduce pledge drive damage.
- Testing air personalities for their appeal to our dominant VALS listener types.
- Assessing new program concepts in the same way **before** investing in them.

I can hear producers yelping from here: Garrison Keillor would never have happened! *Car Talk* wouldn't exist!

But my long experience with program development, my study of VALS theory, and my familiarity with AUDIENCE 98's data tell me otherwise.

I believe that as a public service, public radio's challenge is to attract significant public support for an intellectually honest, commercially uninfluenced programming product. It's a much trickier business than General Motors' or Nike's. That's why commercial VALS products just won't do.

And that's also why leaving the powerful field of

human psychology undeveloped as a resource for programming and fundraising decisions simply doesn't make sense.

Of all the possibilities for further research that AUDIENCE 98 has raised, applications based on our listeners' values and interests seem to hold the most promise.

We're an industry of highly educated, values-driven professionals who rely on the support of

highly educated, values-driven people. But we were too dumb to invest further in VALS after AUDIENCE 88, and we missed out on its many possible benefits.

In 10 years our listeners have earned graduate degrees by the millions. But have **we** gotten any smarter?

– Leslie Peters