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Client: WCBN-FM

Background Research Report

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Summary: WCBN-FM is a freeform radio station, broadcasting at 88.3 FM, run by the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor students, alumni and community members. According to their “About Us” page the radio emphasizes on alternative broadcasting exposing listeners to various live talk shows and music performances they may not hear on other radio stations, which is presented in their Production A Studio. WCBN-FM would be open to new ideas and suggestions regarding electronic scheduling specifically for the Production A studio and communications between the production teams and those who need to reserve the space.

Summary of client’s problem or design challenge: WCBN-FM would like to have an improved and consistent training procedure, creating a goal that is standardized for all members of the WCBN-FM team on their training process and finding a better way to keep records on those who have been properly trained for specific equipment with the main focus on the Production A Studio.

Questions:

1. How can the WCBN-FM have effective communication amongst the executive team members, students, alumni and the local community of Ann Arbor?
2. Which electronic scheduling application(s) would be best for the WCBN-FM’s Production A Studio, including the other studios as well?
3. Can the WCBN-FM’s Production A Studio scheduling be realistically implemented?

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Introduction | About WCBN-FM

WCBN-FM (www.wcfn.org) is a freeform radio station broadcasting at 88.3 FM and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor students runs the radio station, alumni and community members. According to their “About Us” page the radio emphasizes alternative broadcasting exposing listeners to various live talk shows and music performances which might not be able to listen to on other radio stations. A group of board members funds WCBN-FM while the executives and team members from the organization consist of mostly various undergraduate and master student volunteers. The Chief Engineer is the only paid position for this organization who helps fix and install equipment at WCBN-FM. The freeform radio station would like to have an improved and consistent training procedure. Creating a goal that is standardized for all members of the WCBN-FM team for their training process and finding a better way to keep records on those who have already attended the Production A Studio training for specific equipment. WCBN-FM’s Production A Studio is where they do their editing and airing programs. The Production A Studio is used often by the University of Michigan students, alumni and local community members of Ann Arbor. To provide an improved and consistent training procedure understanding how useful communication and scheduling between production teams, organization members and especially for those who need to reserve the Production A Studio space is an important aspect.

Creating an Effective Communication Environment for WCBN-FM

In this modern generation, we have been taking communication for granted because of how easily accessible it is to communicate through common technologies having it at our disposal from texting, tweeting, face-timing, and e-mail messaging.^{1, 4} The difference between regular communication and effective communication is the exchanging and understanding of information.^{4, 6} For all types of communication, the messages should type out with purpose-driven, consistency, relevant, clear and concise to the audience.⁴ Kathy J. Lang, the Chief Information Officer at Marquette University in 2015, provides her tactic of keeping herself focused on providing effective communication by asking herself five main questions: “1) What is the event, issue, or information I want to communicate? 2) What do I need or want to say about that event, issue, or information? 3) Who needs to hear the message? 4) Who needs to deliver the message? 5) What tools and format should be used to deliver the message?”⁴ These questions can be helpful and applied to any task WCBN-FM may need within their organization.

WCBN-FM's General Manager, Jason Young, mentioned the organizations' turnovers are very high due to graduate students. Having effective communication is one of the key factors in making any organization successful.⁵ Effective communication is important and can increase member's loyalties and ties to the organization.⁵ WCBN-FM can have an effective communication amongst the executives and production teams by providing a thorough, effective communication and scheduling training sessions open to all members of the organization which could also be advantageous in the long run for everyone's professional careers. There have been researches shown from the Mayfield's proving if executive members practice leadership communication it can play an integral role in developing and sustaining the volunteer's commitment.⁵ Communication between executives or production teams and members are critical because poor communication reduces coordination and cooperation within the organization.⁶ Ineffective communication within an organization can create confusion, mistrust, and inconsistency and reflects on the organization.⁶ Establishing positive relationships depend primarily on competent leadership skills providing firmly grounded communication abilities such as listening to feedback provided by the members and community, coaching, and information-sharing.^{5,6}

There have also been researches done showing good leadership communication can improve through training.⁵ Having effective communication improve relationships by building trust, respect, and professional skills creating environments where creative ideas, problem-solving, and collaboration can flourish.⁴ WCBN-FM has mentioned the executives and various production teams already have their private Slack groups. Adding a free-form discussion chatroom in Slack, Google Groups, Facebook Page or Twitter as an open forum to all members and communities within their broadcasting range could be an effective communication style. Public chatrooms can allow the organization to receive feedbacks from external listeners and internal organizational members, as well as promoting their upcoming programs and fundraisers, bridging and creating an effective and transparent communication between the organization and the Ann Arbor local community.

Other Solutions to Create an Effective Communication for WCBN-FM

In addition to an open forum for effective communication within the organization and its community, possible solutions to selectively focus on solving the Production A Studio training would be providing an option of voice-based chat rooms with video camera features or easily

accessible video recordings posted on YouTube. Since Production A Studio offers various programs not all equipment in the studio applies to every member of the organization. Members who have gone through training provided by WCBN-FM might sometimes need a refresher throughout the year having the option to connect with another member of the team specialized for the member's purpose using a voice-based chatroom with the camera feature turned on, such as Google Hangout or iPhone FaceTime, would be another option for an effective communication. Having a voice-based chatroom with no video camera features would lack the visual clues available in a face-to-face interaction.⁷ It would be unhelpful if the voice-based chatroom has no camera features, trainers specifically assigned to the Production A Studio would have a tough time explaining the equipment in the studios. Assigning someone to be available for contact in case of arising inquiries would be a solution for the organization. A 2011 industry report conducted by Training Magazine reveals a majority of training has evolved into some form of technology such as web-based training instead of face-to-face training, allows for more customization and flexibility.³ Since current generations are visual learners another possibility of training or refreshing those already trained to use the Production A Studio, would be to create 2-minute-long videos uploaded onto YouTube or Vimeo. The videos would target specific and specialized training where members of the organization can retrieve at any given time during their Production A Studio session instead of flailing around trying to figure out whom to contact when problems arise.

Scheduling solutions for WCBN-FM

As much as we hope for computer-based solutions to solve our scheduling needs, human contributions still requires effective scheduling performance.² There are various forms of scheduling such as devising personnel rosters, administrative timetables, and production scheduling.² Creating a shared public calendar which includes scheduled slots of consistent training sessions for the Production A Studio provides transparency amongst the executives or production team and members of the organization. The purpose of preparing a training schedule is ensuring smooth, organized and timely mannered training process. WCBN-FM is currently still looking for a Production A Studio manager, tasked to plan and manage the training and reservation slots of the studio. The manager's primary role is not to carry out sequencing or allocation decisions but should be mainly involved in goal-directed activities with objectives. Using roles to enable the tasks and fill the gaps between schedules and relationships between the

production teams and radio station contributors. Along with monitoring all the scheduled activities being aware of what is going on in the Production A Studio.²

WCBN-FM has their physical scheduling list currently tacked on the door of the Production A Studio's window. Physical monthly schedules, time sheets, training descriptions for various specialized programs such as talk shows or DJ, are still needed as a reference and should be available outside of the Production A studio in an organized binder as a back-up in case the scheduling applications or the building has a system outage.⁴ The Production A Studio manager should also keep in mind to schedule extra time before and after each program or training sessions to alleviate possible booking problems such as last-minute contingencies and emergencies for unplanned interruptions.⁸ WCBN-FM could have a computer monitor outside of the Production A Studio displaying the daily, weekly or monthly schedule and contact information of those who have booked the studio including printed resources. If WCBN-FM decides to use the Float scheduling manager, they can collect data and manage the scheduling of the studio productively. If they choose to stick with Google Calendar, a particular extension would need to be created that provides the scheduling data statistics including checking in and out of the Production A Studio.

Suggested Scheduling Applications for WCBN-FM

Free applications such as Google Calendar (www.google.com/calendar) requires a lot of manual inputs and not quite as user-friendly for iPhone users. The WCBN-FM's Assistant to the General Manager, Robert Li, advised that the executives and production teams are currently using Google Calendar, but the scheduling aspects are not used formally within the organization. Doodle (doodle.com) provides various languages and allows calendar integration, but it seems to be more applicable amongst the executives or production teams to schedule meetings with each other. Although Doodle can be a helpful tool to create a consistently scheduled training session for both the trainer and the trainees. In 2017, Trello (trello.com) became acquired by Atlassian an Australian enterprise software company. Trello provides a free registration of unlimited boards, lists, cards, members, checklists and attachments, allowing users to manage projects with ease, freedom, and flexibility. If the WCBN-FM executives and production teams have not been using it already, this scheduling application might make the organization more transparent. Another similar scheduling application, Float (www.float.com/top-10-resource-scheduling-software-float.html), which sets them apart from the others providing a comprehensive set of editing tools

being able to change the schedule easily by drag, drop, insert, replace, splice and duplicate any task with your mouse and keyboard shortcuts. Provides live schedule updates allowing the organization to be updated anywhere at any time. They also have a report feature populating data of scheduled events created in the application. This feature could be a useful tool for the executives and production teams to rehash and analyze their productivity and scheduling trends per semester.

There are other scheduling application sites similar to Trello and Float but to have more customizable choices and booking spaces requires more money per month ranging from \$10-\$100 depending on the scheduling system. A widely recommended and advertised website is 10 to 8 (10to8.com) used by various businesses, integrates multiple applications such as Google Calendar, WordPress and Facebook. Since WCBN-FM is student-run volunteering organization with no paid positions for the executives or production teams, 10 to 8 's free sign up option for small businesses which includes 100 appointments per month, two staff logins, text messaging included, and online support could be a proper scheduling application for the WCBN-FM. The executives and production teams can share one login and provide the second login for the volunteer members of the organization, accessible on the desktop or laptop placed outside of the Production A Studio. The booking appointments from the application would refer to as training sessions for WCBN-FM since the radio station programs are already firmly scheduled before each radio station season by the program director.

Conclusion:

WCBN-FM's Production A Studio scheduling can be implemented realistically if the executives and the production teams can have effective communication amongst themselves and the other student members of the organization. Replacing but not removing the printed, traditional method of a sign-up sheet tacked up on the door of the Production A Studio. Providing various technological ways of accessing training procedures or equipment usage can also give WCBN-FM's executives and production teams opportunities to focus on other essential aspects of the organization. Kathy J. Lang mentions, "communication is easy. We're just not always conscientious about it. Effective communication takes ongoing effort."⁴ Effective communication and transparency between everyone related to the organization can create a stronger sense of community and hopefully provide a slight decrease of turn-overs in the

organization and to make the Production A Studio manager an attractive position, giving them ease in monitoring the roles and tasks of the studio bookings and training sessions.

Citations

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