

How a radio programme is made

RTÉ

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Introduction

RTÉ has four separate and very distinct radio stations in operation: RTÉ Radio 1, RTÉ 2fm, RTÉ lyric fm and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta. Each station has a full schedule of programming to be filled, so in addition to special programmes and one-off documentaries, the main output for each of these stations is regular items that have to be produced to the same high standards every day. News and Current Affairs programmes are produced by the News and Current Affairs division of RTÉ for radio, television and the internet. For non-news programmes, the idea has to be pitched to a Channel Head or Editor as a good proposition that will entertain, inform and stimulate listeners. Once the go-ahead is given, a budget is allocated, staff are assigned and it is then up to the producer to put the whole programme together, making decisions on the general content, style and format as s/he sees fit, with the full back-up of a skilled production team.

The Production Team

Producers-in-charge, producers, presenters, researchers, sound operators, broadcasting assistants, production co-ordinators - there are many different roles involved in making a radio programme, and a variety of skills and abilities required to get the job done. All these people interact and each contributes to making a successful radio broadcast.



Producer

The producer is responsible for the programme as a whole: from generating ideas to editing, from the overall quality of the broadcast, to co-ordinating the work of the entire team: sound operators, presenter(s), broadcasting assistants and researchers. S/he supervises the programme team and is also the person most closely involved in editing, both from a technical point of view and in making the decisions about what should be included and what should be omitted. The producer generally oversees the entire process from coming up with an idea for a show through to the broadcast itself; if it is to go out live, s/he will be present for the duration to keep things running smoothly.



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Presenter

It takes a certain kind of person to present a successful radio programme. Without the added visual tools that television provides, a radio presenter must work hard to keep the attention of the audience. Prior to a broadcast, the presenter works closely with the producer and together they will decide how the programme will flow, sometimes within the guidelines of a pre-prepared script (for example in a comedy-based show), sometimes not (certain types of music programmes and of course talk and phone-in shows, where they may just have a list of topics or discussion areas to work from) and what content the programme will have. Of course, the presenter is expected to have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and is usually involved in the research of the show.

Researcher

All programmes require research and preparation. Research can take many forms and can be conducted by one person or a team of people using a variety of resources. It may take several telephone calls and/or the use of the internet to track down one vital piece of information, or it can mean trawling through the reference library or sound archives to find a particular tape or newspaper cutting which is crucial to the subject matter of the programme. Another important job is frequently to get the most up-to-date background information on guests or celebrities who will be featured on a particular programme. A brief will need to be written on any topic researched so that the presenter has as good an understanding as possible of the subject matter at hand. Researchers can be employed to work on one programme or a series of programmes.

Broadcasting Assistant

A broadcasting assistant provides vital support to the presenter and producer during a show. This role involves a variety of different tasks and responsibilities. S/he provides creative input, answers phones during a live show, keeps a record of any material used (music played etc) so that copyright obligations are discharged, and also administers the payment of fees to any studio guests. Another important duty is the creation and filing of comprehensive programme reports, primarily for reference purposes so that if a listener has a query, the answer can be found with the minimum of hassle. There is also correspondence to be dealt with (post, telephone and e-mail) and the booking of technical facilities when necessary for the production of the programme. These facilities can range from a single studio for a talk show for example, to two or more and the associated sound equipment in the case of music shows which will feature bands playing live or "in session".



Sound Operator

For live daytime radio programmes, there will usually be an engineer on duty, ensuring the sound being produced is of sufficient quality to be broadcast and that all necessary pre-recorded material (inserts, advertisements, promos and presenter name-checks) is ready before the programme starts and is played in as necessary with precision timing. The engineer will also check all sound equipment to be used is in perfect working order – this includes all external telephone lines and links to other studios that will be used during the programme. Feature programmes, such as documentaries, are usually recorded and compiled by producers themselves though they may enlist the help of an operator if the programme is particularly complex. For music programmes, especially when artists are playing in the studio, there can be two engineers on duty.

Depending on the type of programme being made, varying combinations of production and technical staff will contribute to the radio programmes. Most daily programmes have large teams, whereas a documentary might be researched, produced and presented by the same person.

Copies of all RTÉ Radio programmes are stored by RTÉ Libraries and Archives.

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