

### Peer review reports on BBC 1Xtra and the BBC Asian Network

#### 10.5.1 Simon Das – BBC 1Xtra

##### Biographical details

After a career in freelance music journalism contributing to i-D magazine and TimeOut in London, El País in Madrid and The Fader in New York, Simon was instrumental in the setting-up of youth culture website and online music portal AmmoCity.com before taking over as editor of Britain's best-known urban music monthly, Touch Magazine, in 2002. Having since edited the official MOBO Magazine in 2003 and created a bespoke publication for The Prince's Trust Urban Music Festival in 2004, Simon also lectures young people in Magazine Journalism at Waltham Forest College in east London.

#### 10.5.2 Russel Myrie – BBC 1Xtra

##### Biographical details

Russell Myrie is Arts editor for 'The Voice' and has written for 'Touch', 'Blues and Soul', 'The Fader' and 'Hip-Hop Connection' amongst others.

#### 10.5.3 Asjad Nazeer – BBC Asian Network

##### Biographical details

Asjad Nazir is Showbiz editor of Eastern Eye, the biggest selling and most influential Asian newspaper in the UK. He has also freelanced for like India Weekly, Asian Times, Eastern Eye, Sunday Times and Time Out.

He has written two books: 100 Greatest Bollywood Stars and 100 Greatest Bollywood Films, over 100 columns for PANEWS.COM, had his work published overseas and was used as an expert by organisations like Radio 5, Sky News, and newspapers such as the Sunday Express.

#### 10.5.4 Beena Nadeem

##### Biographical details

After completing a post-graduate NCTJ in journalism at London's City University, Beena went onto work for Haymarket Business Publications across a range of its trade and business titles and then worked on an environmental paper, before entering a career at EMG as reporter across a range of its newspapers, including Eastern Eye. From there she went onto write for leading women's glossy, Asian Woman magazine and its sister publication, Asian Bride. She now freelances for titles including Men's Fitness, Rough Guides, Press Gazette and the Daily Mail Ski magazine. She also contributes to a number of features on diversity and about Asian and black related issues and events.

## REVIEW OF BBC 1Xtra

### SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT FROM TOUCH MAGAZINE

#### Touch Magazine – A young urban British music magazine

Touch Magazine is one of Britain's longest-running monthly urban music magazines. Having started out in Brixton in the early Nineties as a free magazine promoting the then underground scene of 'black music', it has remained in private ownership, independent of the major magazine publishers and is currently the best-known glossy UK-based urban music and fashion title for a mainly teenage readership (14 – 21) concentrated in Britain's major cities. This shows considerable overlap with the perceived target audience of BBC 1Xtra.

#### **1Xtra and its promotion of digital radio**

From the point of view of Touch Magazine, there have been many positive outcomes since the launch of BBC's 1Xtra platform. Broadly speaking, they have aided the promotion of the digital radio (DAB) and have been seen to encourage some diverse music programming, different from that of some commercial radio services. In the last twelve months they have been very active in the highlighting of new British musical talent in the urban genre, and in part, have been responsible for the success of artists such as the Mercury Award winning Dizzee Rascal.

Through the likes of their new talent presenter, Ras Kwame, they have even brought acts to the attention of Touch that we might have missed out on, despite our considerable base of stringers and freelancers. This is particularly true of non-South East based acts, crews and groups who have been aided by a nation-wide urban music station, despite their lack of proximity to places like London, Leeds or Birmingham.

On the negative side, a casual drop-in to 1Xtra normally exposes a daytime programming of massive Top Ten American R 'n' B giants such as R Kelly, Nelly and Missy Elliot - artists that are not only the daytime fare of existing commercial stations such as Choice FM and the Galaxy network, but ironically also Radio 1 and commercial TV.

#### **Target audience – who is 1Xtra really aimed at?**

##### (i) R 'n' B and hip hop have become Top Ten pop music

While Touch Magazine and others enjoy the backdrop of urban music becoming the default mainstream youth culture in the years since Touch's launch 13 years ago, increasingly major A-list artists tend to be from the US and receive airplay, exposure, and press coverage everywhere. A debate about the on-going remit for 1Xtra might need to ask whether it's doing something uniquely different from any other commercial radio station by playlisting such acts. We would expect a public service station to provide more daytime airplay of new British underground music

alongside a much stronger level of news journalism and spoken word content considering the amount of public resources 1Xtra is known to have consumed in the last year-and-a-half.

#### (ii) 1Xtra and the Afro-Caribbean community

In setting-up a station that ostensibly caters for young urban music listeners, 1Xtra's commissioning editors might occasionally be accused of assuming this service is mainly for members of Britain's Afro-Caribbean community. We feel this is a mistake, as we know from having championed urban music for over a decade, 'black' music - for want of a better word - is divided between black, white, Asian and other ethnic minority listeners. A point for discussion might be that 1Xtra looks at ways to better reflect this, and we welcome the relatively recent recruitment of The Panjabi Hit Squad to 1Xtra for this reason as well as DJ Femme Fatale, who has provided a good crossover figurehead for garage music since the station's launch.

If 1Xtra is, however, intended to be a service for black Britons (who don't have a public service station such as the BBC Asian Network), then they might have to look into providing editorial and music content for a much wider age group (ie 15 year-olds through to 60 year-olds), something it doesn't at the present time. Catering for the tastes of the estimated 1m black population will require a totally different focus; for example, the significant cultural differences between Caribbean-heritage and African-heritage listeners.

#### **News and documentaries – room for improvement**

We understand from the Secretary Of State's charter that 1Xtra is required to maintain 20% speech content, including around 10% covering news, documentaries and social action programming. At Touch we've welcomed the 1Xtra two-hour news show, TX Unlimited, but think it's a little disingenuous to throw it all into one slot. Perhaps more of this could be provided in bite-sized chunks throughout the day? We also think that the 10% news-based remit needs to be a bare minimum. Anecdotally, quite a few people have fed-back very positively to the documentary-style items that have recently been introduced to the 1Xtra programming, an item of gun-crime in contemporary Britain being a recent example.

#### **A better 'community' focus?**

Commercial entities in urban music industry, such as Touch Magazine and Choice FM seem to have the perception of being more community-issue focused (presumably after years of nurturing the industry), despite them not having a public service raison d'etre. For example, according to Choice FM, they broadcast over 250 hours a year of programming which looks at socio-political issues from racism, career advice, media issues via a phone-in show and a regular Wednesday evening, in addition to many one-off dedicated programmes. With the journalistic resource base of the BBC at hand, perhaps 1Xtra needs to resemble, at times, other public service stations such as BBC London, which cover black, and ethnic debate and news to a very high standard for many more hours per week.

A current issue, for example (and one that the editor of Touch Magazine, Simon Das is involved with via the Learning And Skills Council), is the plethora of young ethnic

minorities who have skills shortages that thwart potential careers in media. With a more community-focused remit, 1Xtra would be doing more than simply recruiting and training for their own internal needs. The bigger picture is perhaps to use their BBC prestige to champion initiatives similar the Urban Music Seminar (UMS) in conjunction with many other media-partners in the industry.

### **Review of programming and standards**

In the area of specialist DJs, 1Xtra has some very credible people in the urban music scene. Particular positive attention must be drawn to the likes of Rodney P & Skitz in their championing of UK hip hop acts in this US dominated sub-genre. Feedback from Touch readers also indicates a strong respect for Ras Kwame (who also is a Touch columnist) in his championing of un-signed musical talent.

In terms of programme timings, we have found some odd inconsistencies. For example, on Sunday mornings the listener is taken from a lively mainly commercial R 'n' B show with Latitia, through to a show with Phil Asher at Midday which is very similar to what Gilles Petterson does on Radio 1 in the early hours of the morning – ie obscure old soul, disco and house music that, although fantastic and rare, lends itself to a 'backroom of a club'.

Our greatest criticism of standards, however, must be our noticing of the occasional poor live interview, link, soundbite and news segment; the likes of which do match the standard of the BBC's Newsbeat or BBC London.

### **Impact on Touch Magazine – 1Xtra's web presence**

As an independent publication with very limited resources for expenditure outside print publishing, it's felt that the 1Xtra website provides such an exhaustive choice of urban music, aided by one of the world's most popular URL destinations ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)), it would be difficult for Touch to compete with this should it wish to improve on the level of interactive services online.

#### **Pirate Radio**

As a supporter of underground music and grass-roots energy, 1Xtra must be very conscious of the fact that in many urban city centres, urban pirate radio is more than thriving, and 1Xtra is having little or no impact on it. As much as pirate radio can't provide an impressive online catalogue of shows, interview and mixes, it's widely known that the pirates' very young audience probably do not have the relatively inaccessible equipment needed to enjoy 1Xtra, such as broadband internet access, decent computers and least-likely of all, a good quality DAB radio at home or in-car.

### **Recommendations – An improved public service 1Xtra**

Touch believe 1Xtra to be an excellent station, with a very good associated website, but that a debate should take place about the public service remit of 1Xtra, looking at whether it should be broadened and even undergo a change in focus.

It seems the BBC created 1Xtra (along with 6 Music and other digital services) based on what was already out there in the marketplace and what expertise they already had. This, naturally, has a detrimental impact to fair competition and even affects the urban magazine sector (Touch, Rewind et al) in terms of what online presence we might offer.

In terms of editorial policy and programming, one of the areas in which 1Xtra might immediately look at is the similarity of sound / feel and content of its daytime programming with that of Choice FM and The Galaxy Network. With it having established itself as a mainstream urban music digital station, public service programming might be better served by:

- More spoken word / debate programming
- A more genuine multi-ethnic community focus
- Play-listing much less American Top Forty R 'n' B and hip hop
- Play-listing more UK underground music, and perhaps to feature budget / unsigned music videos on-demand
- Increasing the quantity and quality of spoken word programmes, news and journalism
- Not falling into vanguard-chasing programming: ie is there more to 'black' music than garage, R 'n' B, and hip hop? Is world music, jazz and leftfield talent being represented, as commercial stations / magazines have less scope to do this.

**Simon Das, Editor Touch Magazine, 29/06/04**

## Peer Review of 1xtra

When 1xtra was first announced and subsequently launched there was great excitement within the black community and beyond. Even those sectors of the media who weren't traditionally interested in what is popularly termed 'urban' music wanted to know what the fuss was all about. Practically everyone who worked within black media wanted to get a job. To demonstrate this, every event the station held prior to its launch was crowded out with people waving CV's and portfolios and trying to pretend they knew all the important people in the place.

The station has done what it said it would do. It has won awards, it has proved popular nationwide, and it is still here. Many naysayers predicted an early death. The editorial standard is generally high - this is the BBC after all and a certain standard has to be maintained. But is mixed with a kind of street savvy. This dual approach means the station is accessible to a widespread variety of listeners, as opposed to pirate radio which requires people to know the latest slang and trends, and is therefore only truly accessible to ghetto dwellers. However, the station's style is rooted in pirate radio - many of the stations presenters (similarly to many stations) have roots in pirate radio. In fact, one of the initial criticisms 1xtra faced from the black community is that they pursued and acquired a plethora of former pirate deejays with BBC money. Resources the pirates don't have. It was seen as another case of 'the man' buying up things that has already been built up through more grassroots efforts.

But the pirates haven't suffered. One thing 1xtra will never do is replace pirate radio. But the two can obviously co-exist. 1xtra is perhaps more beneficial to people who don't live in the major cities (London, Birmingham, Manchester etc) and who therefore don't have pirate radio. By the same token, things like 1xtra live are crucial for those whose towns aren't visited when black music artists tour the country. The only thing that will stop pirate radio is if they are given licenses to operate legally. But 1xtra hasn't picked up all of pirate radio's habits. Thankfully, the 1xtra dj's do not chat as much as pirate radio dj's tend to. The speech content is just right. The station definitely supports and stimulates diversity. The most obvious way in which this occurs is that the majority of the deejay crews on the station are of mixed heritage. The Panjabi Hit Squad consists of two Asians and a white guy. Similarly, The Heartless Crew consist of two black guys and a Londoner of Middle Eastern heritage. In this way they reflect the nature of many cities whereby multi racial groups of friends adopt a stance and style that is easily identifiable as being heavily influenced by black culture and sensibilities.

In addition to reaching a largely multicultural city audience 1xtra is also aiding multiculturalism by reaching a nationwide audience. In the majority of Britain's towns the vast majority of their audience will of course be predominantly white. However, these white kids are being exposed to authentic black culture in a way that simply didn't happen before. Of course the danger here is that some may latch onto the more negative stereotypes that exist in some black music today. A situation that is often referred to as 'The Ali-G effect.'

But Femme Fatale is white. Benji B is white. Black music isn't as standoffish as popular opinion likes to suggest. The two aforementioned dj's have skills and are passionate about music and are therefore accepted as 'real'. Of course you will always have the over zealous parts of the black community who will bemoan the presence of white deejays as a loss of opportunity for blacks, but you get those kind of extreme opinions in every sector of society, be it race or class based.

With regard to digital radios the simple answer is yes, although the impact isn't huge.

The majority check out the station on their TV (some people have it on their TV while they sit on the settee and read, or listen while they are getting ready to go out) and some listen via the internet. Nevertheless, a growing number are purchasing digital radios so they can listen to the station in a way that they are used to.

1xtra is very unique. Firstly, it's distinctive in that it's a BBC owned venture that is dedicated to black music and actually says 'black' as opposed to the much hated 'urban'. This is probably mainly because the station began broadcasting before 'urban' entered common parlance, but at least it's something.

One way in which 1xtra is truly distinctive is in its treatment of British black music. British music is truly on a par with the US superstars in terms of airplay and respect. The majority of high profile hip-hop shows on other stations sideline British black music to varying degrees. Crucially, 1xtra is the only legal station that offers a continued and credible support of the (albeit London-centric) British underground music that used to be called UK garage but is now often referred to as Grime or Eski-beat.

The representation of British Black Music is one of 1xtra's greatest strengths. Shows like Ras Kwame's Homegrown show are the epitome of this. He presents a wicked selection of music that encompasses the whole black music scene incorporating hip-hop, r'n'b, grime and reggae.

Also, Semtex presents a good mixture of styles on his Saturday mixtape. He mainly focuses on hip-hop but is very up to date with the grimey emcees as well - he recently premiered three new Dizzee Rascal tunes and has played a selection of tracks from the forthcoming Roll Deep album. In today's marketplace it is a little unusual to hear hip-hop shows that play all the sub-genres of the music. Semtex's Def Jam connections do not hurt at all either.

The station excels with regard to appealing to its target audience. On a broad level it appeals to its audience who are young black music fans of all races. The vast majority will be in their teens or twenties.

Additionally, the individual presenters are specialists in their fields and know their audiences inside out, and demonstrate this best when stepping just outside their chosen genre. Benji B, who helms the broken beat show, knows exactly which neo-soul and hip-hop tunes to play to include in his playlist. A hip-hop selection will quite often be something by Detroit's J Dilla, formerly of Slum Village. His style of production is not a million miles away from the style heard on most broken beat records. The drum patterns are often similar.

There are many examples of this expertise. As well as championing popular underground artists like Donae'o, Wonder and Durrty Doogz, The Heartless Crew know exactly which r'n'b and hip-hop songs their audience will be receptive to.

These are mainly the tunes that are more dancefloor orientated (often referred to as 'jump up' tunes.) Similarly, Seani B is adept at picking the right hip-hop tracks to playlist for a reggae audience. The Panjabi Hit Squad mix in hip-hop instrumentals with their Desi beats.

But in contrast the drum'n'bass deejays - as the drum'n'bass scene perhaps tends to be - are to a large extent insular and don't play any music that doesn't fall under their area of expertise. A look at their playlist will reveal only drum'n'bass tunes. Likewise, Robbo Ranx concentrates on reggae.

Many deejays use their connections within their respective scenes to aid their shows. Rodney P and Skitz cater for their audience with exclusives from many popular artists with a more traditional UK hip-hop sound like Phi-Life Cypher and Skinnyman, who are just as likely to be heard during Ras Kwame's airtime. Excalibah's UK dub states are another example.

Many of these deejays used to *be* their audience.

Due to the widespread popularity of r'n'b - the most commercially viable form of black music, mainly due to its lyrical content - the r'n'b deejays, and their playlists, are not immediately distinguishable from the majority of deejays on any station, legal or otherwise. But the listeners do receive regular history lessons through outlets for classic tunes like Diggs Soul Power Salute. Also, in Ronnie Herel they have one of the finest and seasoned r'n'b spinners in the country.

The news has been met with minor criticism. Some say the music news is late and not as up to date as some websites which is where the majority of music fans get their fix. But the news is a good mixture of industry related gossip and current affairs.

Another potential negative is that the station, while exploring more intellectual avenues through their documentaries (such as Rodney P's recent documentary which explored the music scene in South Africa), undoubtedly focuses on music. Some black people feel this promotes the view that the black community just wants to dance the night away and can't be bothered with the more serious side of life. To be fair though, this anger is directed more at the BBC than 1xtra, who they feel have this view of blacks. Many point to the Asian Network. It is felt they cover current affairs relating to their community more extensively.

It's difficult to gauge how the industry as a whole views 1xtra. Firstly, the industry is notoriously fickle. There are also many viewpoints at play here.

However, the industry must be very aware that 1xtra is another outlet taking listeners away from Radio 1. On a nationwide level, there is an ever-growing audience that Radio One simply does not know how to cater to. 1xtra is one more important reason why the top 10 is regularly full of r'n'b and hip-hop.

**Russell Myrie**

## BBC Review

### Introduction

As requested this is a peer review essay of the BBC's new digital radio station the Asian Network. The key points to be discussed revolve around the editorial standards speech content, the promotion of the uptake of digital radio, BBC Asian Network's distinctiveness from other radio stations, appeal to target audience, issues discussed being of particular interest to the target audience and a review of the presenters, play-list and program content. In addition the essay will look at the way the music industry regards the Asian Network and if it affects the market.

From the perspective of someone who has observed the station from the beginning, it has been very apparent that the BBC Asian Network is an essential airwave driven by a series of peaks and troughs. It has failed to match up to the high level of service the public deserves and the high standard expected from the BBC. Inconsistent throughout almost the entire programming schedule the station contains good presenters next to bad ones, weak editorial next to good, great music next to bad and in depth analysis of important topics next to very poor coverage of vital issues.

### Editorial

The Achilles heal of the entire corporation seems to be the research teams that have been employed to gather content for the station because they seem to be constantly struggling to deliver the goods. This has resulted in serious inconsistency in quality and mostly average content driving a lot of the key shows. Lack of drive, initiative and creativity can be the only explanation for this inconsistency. That is because instead of trying to create their own stories the research teams employed by the BBC Asian Network will usually centre discussions and editorial features on stories they observe in newspapers, hear on other radio stations or see on television. That is why one doesn't generally hear many breaking stories or new topics of discussions not covered by other media sources on the station. In that sense, someone who is supposed to be the leader is happier following the crowd. That is usually a great way to get people to switch off.

Although following a lead is something that is very acceptable in major stories it shouldn't make up the backbone of the activity of a vitally important radio station like this one. That is why more effort should be made to find stories happening within the British Asian community. The window on world events also needs to be more expanded than it already is and the needs of the public should be identified more.

Lack of cultural awareness from many of the presenters, researchers and production teams hasn't aided in the standards in editorial being raised. This should not occur on a station that is representing multi-cultural Britain and there should be a higher turn over of editorial because of the resources available. The net result of making such a mistake is that the station has distanced itself from the grass roots listeners,

who instead of complaining are happier to switch onto other radio stations or to cable television.

## **Music**

If the general standard of the editorial is poor, thankfully the quality of the music is a lot better. Although a little too heavy with Bollywood songs, the music encompasses a good mix of genres and south Asian languages. Although the standard of traditional and popular music from the past is very good the new path breaking music and particularly British Asian music is often played on Radio 1Xtra, Radio One and Club Asia before it ever reaches the BBC Asian network. A part of the reason for this is that the station doesn't do enough to see what is happening on the scene. That is stark contrast to Club Asia, Radio One and 1Xtra who regularly send their DJs out to clubs and live events.

Being a step behind hasn't stopped the station from being hugely influential and important for the Asian music industry. The music scene is happy that an organisation like BBC Asian Network is available as a channel for their music. The biggest labels use the station for their music because it can affect the market and provide a great platform for the artists and featured songs. That makes it an essential service for the music industry because they have a much harder time getting airplay on other radio stations. "We are thankful that the BBC Asian Network is there to play our music. The western stations aren't interested in South Asian music and the commercial Indian radio stations ask for money before their review or feature our music. That is wrong and not representative of the music industry and the community. At least with the BBC Asian Network we get a fair shot and our music is played," explained Mohammed Ayub, the owner of record label Oriental Star Agencies.

Although the more established record labels like Oriental Star Agencies are happy with the play list, some of the newer labels and artists find it a lot harder to make the play list.

## **Presenters and Shows**

The quality of presenters improving would aid the station greatly in taking a step in the right direction. A good presenter on the BBC Asian Network is one that should be intelligent, entertaining and should appeal to different age groups, cultures and sensibilities.

The only presenter that has consistently met the criteria since the inception of the station is Sonia Deol; from great discussions and audience participation to choice of music and studio guests, Sonia has driven her morning programme in a forward direction. A good recent addition to the station has been experienced broadcaster Niki Bedi. Her relatively new Hot Breakfast weekend show is very good in all areas and I am sure it will continue to improve with time. Another presenter that deserves a positive mention is Adil Ray because he has developed a loyal fan following. The only downside about his nightly show is that his play list is a couple of months behind the Radio One show presented by Bobby Friction and Nihal.

Most of the other presenters are very one-dimensional in the approach to their shows. Instead of trying to appeal to a wide demographic with their personalities, they rely on the music and very basic features incorporated within the shows. This has distanced them from the listener. A great illustration of this is the number of listeners who telephone the station during discussions. Not that many people phone and the ones who do are not representative of the wider public.

The two presenters that need to raise their game are Gagan Grewal and Ray Khan because they have the key breakfast and drive time slots on the schedule respectively. Not enough importance being given to these vital shows has resulted in little improvement since the beginning.

Perhaps the worst show on the network is the afternoon one presented by Anjum Rafiq. Very basic features like 10 Worst Albums, poor communication, lack of entertainment and poor selection of songs have driven this lunchtime slots into the ground.

Another key show that never quite hits the mark is Film Café. The features and interviews are generally a step behind other media channels and the turnover of content should be a lot more than it is. The presenters they have had don't seem to have enough knowledge of cinema as a whole. Bollywood, although very popular, shouldn't be as dominant as it is. More space is needed to be given to cinema from other South Asian countries and regional Indian cinema.

Another thing that is definitely not healthy for an impartial service provider like the BBC Asian Network is that many of the presenters have outside interests like club nights, festivals, television slots and record deals. This often causes a conflict of interest and takes away the presenters focus from hosting a decent show. So overall, the level of presenters needs to improve throughout the network because most of them just don't have the spark that is needed to light up the station and generate audience interest.

## **The Future**

Aside from the consistently good play list the other great positive going favour of the station is that caters for different cultures with programming in various South Asian languages and it also plays devotional music first thing in the morning. Another step in the right direction is the radio soap Silver Street because it is injecting the variety that is sadly lacking in the editorial content in the station. Silver Street, although a little raw will no doubt evolve into something quite substantial over the time if it becomes less ghettoised.

Other positive aspects that will enable the station to grow are that there are no adverts and occasionally information is given on important social issues.

A step in the right direction would be to create more awareness for those who are not tuning in. Although the network continually tells listeners already tuned in, how to switch on not enough is done to promote the station to those not tuned in. One key way to switch people on would be to develop the web site substantially from its

present state. At the moment there isn't enough creativity and turn over of meaningful content to keep people online for a substantial amount of time.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion the BBC Asian Network is like an influential giant that keeps falling over. More style than actual substance it needs to become a lot more consistent in its programming and quality of actual editorial content. Only then will it start moving in the right direction and start capturing listeners.

**Asjad Nazeer**

## PEER REVIEW OF BBC ASIAN NETWORK

### The editorial standard

The BBC Asian Network provides a rich mix of speech and music to second and third generation Asians in a well thought-out and captivating way, while offering a diverse mixture of programming that covers a wide range of interests of second and third generation Asians in the UK.

Its news and sports coverage is relevant to Asian listeners, while the stations music play list is specifically Asian – covering Asian and British Asian sounds, and within this category, is extremely varied: ranging from bhangra to Bollywood film tunes. It also dedicates airtime to a decent collection of new, emerging and established British-Asian artists. So musically it fulfils what it aims to, although I'd like to see more British-Asian mainstream talent such as Nitan Sawhney or the, Asian Dub Foundation.

Overall, the content doesn't seem as music-centric as many of the commercial stations out there, and therefore its content is more varied. But saying this it could be MUCH more varied. It's good in that it covers film, literature, poetry and interviews with entertainers, a good play list of about forty hours or so a week, as well as discussions on news headlines that are normally missed or glossed over in mainstream coverage. BUT it needs more. It needs to stop assuming that all Asians (especially your target niche) are interested in Asian-relevant issues only. We don't all listen to Hindu music, some of us hate Bollywood and many of us would prefer some meatier, more in-depth coverage on the issues on the street and in the news. We are more than just Asian listeners; in the same way writers are more than just 'Asian writers'.

### What makes the BBC Asian Network, distinctive?

- It's easy to access on a range of platforms.
- It provides listeners with ample chance to air their views.
- You can access its broadcasts from melas, outdoor events and from concerts to clubland making it more connected to communities and listeners.
- The play list remains Asian and British Asian specific, and can go into much more depth in regards to Asian music than any other existing radio stations.
- It has many language specific programs.
- Interactivity is excellent: text: message boards, phone-ins and email based.
- Its news and sports content are relevant and geared towards providing more in-depth coverage into issues that are glossed over by mainstream media.
- It manages to showcase a lot of talent both in front and behind the scenes, through well-researched items and news to on air talent, presenters and musicians.
- Its not solely music-centric offering a daily soap: Silver Street, religious content, poetry and interviews with the stars as well as short reports, although this needs to be expanded significantly.

### **Does the station promote the uptake of digital radio?**

As many of us are aware, the Asian community tends to be more likely to uptake new technologies. You don't really have to stray far to find an aunt, uncle or parent with a digital satellite receiver. This is also where family members can access the station, and would do this rather than dishing out for a digital radio receiver, which can be quite pricey.

I recently checked out the listening figures for Asian Network and found that according to RAJAR, Asian Network has actually 'lost' listeners. The Network's reach was down March 2004 by 70,000, revealing the numbers of listeners have crashed from December 2003's 453,000 to March 2004's 383,00 – quite a drop. And if this is the case, I assume it's unlikely to be spurring any major uptakes at the moment.

The costs of a digital radios could also be putting people off, and at £100 for a basic receiver, add to that sometimes poor sound quality afforded to Asian Network when you listen through a digital radio, you can understand why it's not a great marketing ploy for digital radios, especially when many can access it from satellite at home anyway.

Also, if you ask many Asian people what the BBC's Asian Network is, how they can access it, and what they think. You'll get quite a few blank faces across the board. I did.

### **Is it appealing to its target audiences?**

It does seem to be reaching a lot of people in those areas with large Asian populations, such as Manchester, London, Birmingham and so on listen to the station but many more outside these areas are not even aware it exists. Those who did, I found, had heard the brand name, but didn't know what it did.

According to BBC figures, 80 per cent of the Asian Network's listeners are Asian, indicating the other 20 per cent are outside of its target demographics, indicating it's appeal is wider than Asians. But I suspect this awareness is still limited to areas with larger Asian communities and populations, and by extension is targeting a very specific sort of Asian listener that is has in mind. So it might be reaching the right people and beyond, but not enough of them.

The content certainly appeals, with religious and devotional and language specific as well as classic hindi tunes, the news-related phone-ins, which might possibly appeal to slightly older demographic of its target listeners, while the up-beat music and DJ based shows may appeal to slightly younger listeners of around 15 – 24 years old, although I think it will find it hard to 'grow' an audience if it's offering remains as limited within who it feels it should be targeting, rather than finding out what content they could offer to many groups of British-Asians out there too.

## **Pros and Cons:**

There are large sways of Asian listeners who feel like this station does not address my listening needs or even really have much content that appeals to me personally, regardless of how well put together it is, and that is a little isolating.

The notable and distinct lack of regular documentary-like features is something I feel should be highlighted too. These can be done in a 'magazine' style as to appeal to younger listeners, but something needs to be addressed as many issues from careers, finance – such as Islamic Sharia financing through to taboo but relevant subject experienced by this age group such as self-harm, drug abuse, mixed marriages and so on. This provides an opportunity for open debate, the dissemination of information and reflects issues experienced and lived through by listeners at large, especially within this age range.

Its play list is diverse and varied, and it's coverage of live music events remains key, but as said, needs to diversify even more.

The opportunities for speech and interaction with presenters and other listeners is strong and its news coverage and current affairs programs are well pitched. Its language content is important for older and non-English speakers and can be community specific in content, although some Asian groups are not catered for, such as the Tamils or Sri-Lankans.

Although at the moment, the BBC is offering more diverse content, broader speech content, better interactivity as well as having its own soap opera, it's not something I think of as radically different from other offerings such as Sunrise.

## **Performance of individual presenters:**

Asian Network provides a rich mix of cutting-edge Asian tunes as well as classic Hindi and film music from Bolly and Lollywood, although some of its British Asian coverage is limited. Reach further out and get a more diverse play list!

Adil Ray presents the late night music and chat show, which is a real winner and has become a key part to the Network's offering. His chat-show style could be described as 'desi pub chat without the beer' and is a launch pad for many emerging Asian artists (as is DJ Ritu's, The Mix, on Sundays which includes many first time air plays). These are good elements and need to expand and diversify.

Breakfast time is presented by the chirpy and is presented by Gagan Grewal who hosts a catchy show. Providing news content and sports reports in his show, as well as reports on issues such as the role Islamic art played in Russian history, although this is very limited. It's followed by the not so chirpy Anjum Rafiq, with lunchtime news with a British Asian slant and a dull overtone. Ray Khan's Drive content can also be a little stale with phone-ins being dull and drag-on.

Sonia Deol is to be commended for her patience with people and the time she gives callers on air, but again, I find it slow the conversations drag on. They are all too

polite, or fail to bring out the more interesting side of people. This can't be done unless you introduce more controversial and diverse guests and have a debate.

The weekend-scheduled programmes include the internationally renowned DJ Ritu with the latest news and views on bhangra and remix, Maz Khan who talks to the stars of Hollywood, Bollywood and Lollywood, which is always glamour fodder many never fill of. Sanjeet Saund, who presents an afternoon of sport show, provides an up-to-the minute sporting news that's significant to Asian listeners, such as cricket, but there's also scope for general sports content, such as Euro 2004, which I have to say is something I've not really seen fulfilled elsewhere. We could go more in-depth though and cover the role of up-and-coming Asian stars in football or formula one – and I know there are a few.

There are also Hindu-Urdu programmes for example, those presented by Navinder Bhogal, which includes classic tracks. Overall though, there's definitely a need for new, more up-beat and witty presenters to pull in more listeners, although what is okay, but really does need a shake-up to stay more relevant to the many different sorts of Asian listeners out there.

#### **Affect has on the market:**

Although Asian Network does play a vital role in the penetration of the marketplace for digital radio, this, from the details already discussed, could be said to be limited by the way it is accessed and the lack of digital radios in Asian homes. After all, you can't take your laptop into the shower.

By mixing output and showcasing new talents as well as adding more content and speech than any commercial offering, it provides a beneficial addition to what can sometimes be seen as a crowded market of Asian stations.

It is bringing new voices and production talent into the formal broadcasting sector, both behind and in front of the scenes.

It offers something different from the likes of Sunrise, Radio Punjab, Clubasia and Yaar, thanks to language specific content, its play list, its chat time and its website. However, for me it feels like this is a station not aimed at me, or my interests. It is excellent for many things: music, sport and own-language programmes and lacking in others: real-life, round-ups, what's happening on the street, up-and-coming stars who are not in music, but might be theatre actors, acrobats, sportspeople. Can be inspirational. I also want to learn more about parts of my culture, something new, something informative.

#### **Some responses from the Music Industry:**

The music industry sees the Asian Network as a vital ingredient in the promotion of Asian talent and music, and it also appears very grateful for the platform and air play time it has offered new Asian talents.

Pedro Carvalho, a PR at ethnic PR agency and represents many Asian talents from TV and Music world (including Jay Sean and Juggy D) says, 'Any BBC Station that

play lists Asian artists is of crucial importance – and any station with an official play list is also crucial and is vital part of promoting musicians.’

Taz, singer from group, StereoNation says: ‘The BBC Asian Network is absolutely valuable. It contributes a lot amongst the other media out there, and because of its DAB system, it’s reach is now even further. Most stations are going that way, but the BBC Asian Network is definitely at the forefront and is making a global contribution.’

**Beena Nadeem**