

Localism and Morning Edition

How listeners evaluate local newscasts, breaks and segments within Morning Edition

Following on last year's Core Values study

A Sense of Place: The Value
and Values of Localism in
Public Radio

This project was funded by NPR's Local News Initiative

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Morning Edition is public radio's most important program

- Listening
- Giving
- Underwriting

What listeners actually hear varies widely from market to market

- Local Newscasts
- Local Breaks
- Local Segments

Morning Edition Grad School

“Morning Edition is a different
program on every station”

Tim Emmons, Scott Williams, Peter Dominowski

MEGS Typology

■ Newscasts

- Commercial
- Frantic
- NPR Style
- Feature (one story in depth)

■ Breaks

- Commercial
- Bombastic
- NPR Conversational

■ Segments

- 2-Way Interview
- Commentary
- Feature Report

Do listeners stay tuned when stations insert local coverage into Morning Edition?

That cannot be measured by
the Arbitron diary method

Do listeners find significant
value when stations insert
local coverage into Morning
Edition?

That's the more important
question

Audience 98 found that public support is the result of the value listeners place on the programming

The concept of personal importance

“I would miss it if it went away”

We probed the value of local news and information programs in last year's Sense of Place

36 focus groups
9 markets

2006 Sense of Place

“Public radio listeners would value a station that covers their place with depth, intelligence and a wider perspective, just as NPR covers the nation and the world.”

“The actual performance of local news and information programming too often fails to deliver on its promise.”

2007 Localism and Morning Edition

We found a few examples of local coverage that delivered strong value to Morning Edition listeners

Most of the aircchecks we tested performed at a mediocre level

Our 2007 findings are completely consistent with what we learned in Sense of Place

So long as public radio depends upon listener support, any coverage – local or national – that delivers mediocre value will not be good enough

2007 Research Design

Program testing sessions to determine how listeners evaluate the local coverage that stations insert into Morning Edition

300 listeners used electronic EARS units to enter their moment-to-moment reaction to airchecks that were carefully selected from NPR stations around the country

FMR Associates EARS unit



- Listening to airchecks
- Scale 1-9
- Every second

RESPONSE SCALE:

If I were listening to radio, I would consider this kind of programming to be:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<u>Not Valuable</u>			<u>Somewhat</u>			<u>Highly</u>		
To Me			Valuable			Valuable		

Written Verbatims

From the various newscasts and features that you just heard, recall one that was especially valuable to you. Explain why it was valuable.

From the various newscasts and features that you just heard, recall one that needed improvement before it would be valuable to you. Explain why it was not valuable.

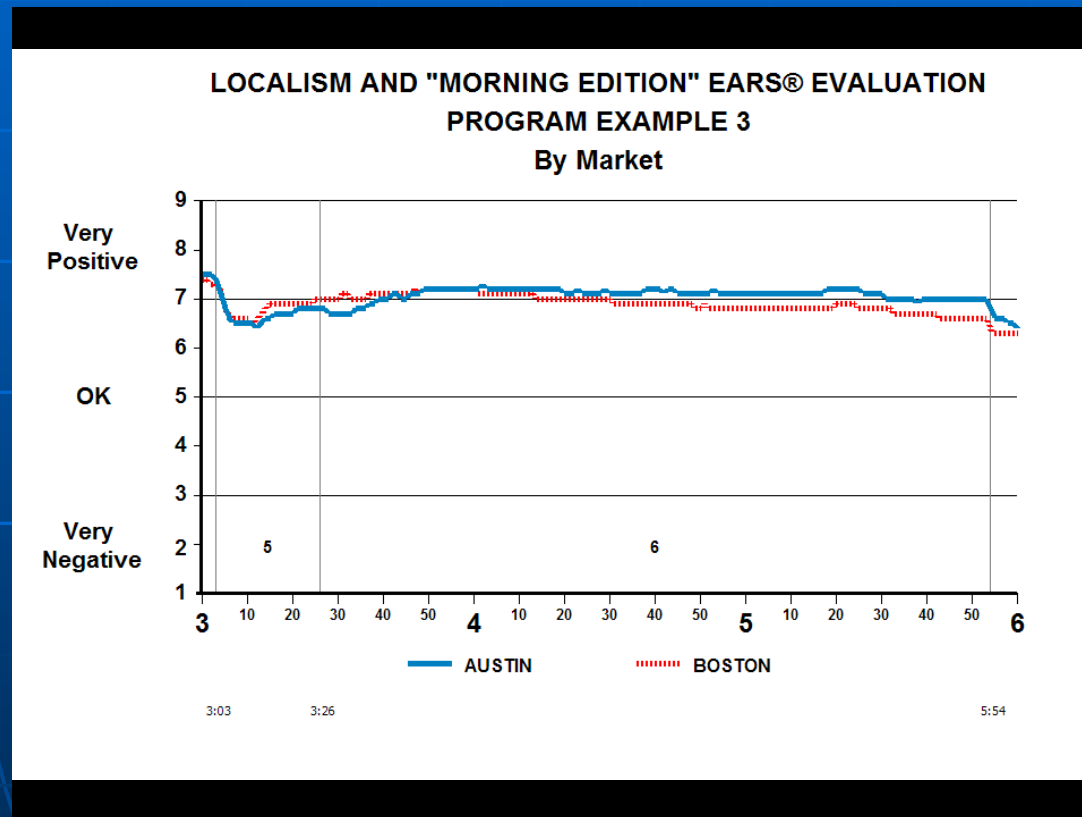
Finding: Context and Connection

There is little value delivered by a local newscast, break or segment if it is conceived and developed as merely local.

Highest Value Segment

2-way Interview

Governor 2-Way



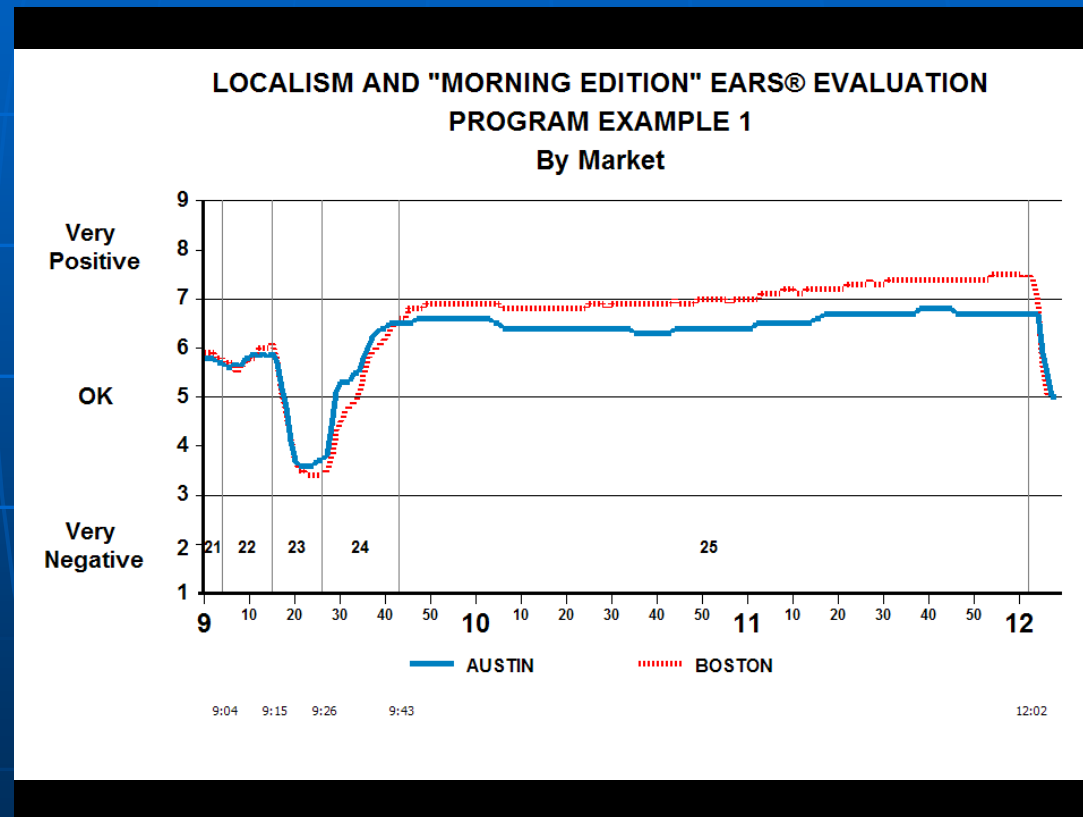
Verbatims

- “The story about the governor fighting for his state against environmental regulations is illustrative of a valuable story of the interplay between federal and state governments. It is the basis of our constitutional government.”
- “The environment and its conflict with this administration is the paramount issue of humanity and our lives. The questions and answers on the part of the governor were precise, intelligent.”

Second Highest Segment

Feature Report

Black College Feature



Verbatims

- “The story of the HBCUs was multi-faceted – i.e., it gave historical, political and social context and it provided current experiences of people attending HBCUs – also current necessary info and necessary or suggested political changes.”
- “The segment on Black colleges and universities was valuable because I am interested in social justice issues, public funding of education and minority identity issues. Thought there was an interesting blend of people being quoted.”

Finding: Learning Facts and Data

NPR listeners want to use
public radio to advance their
learning

Strong Value Newscast

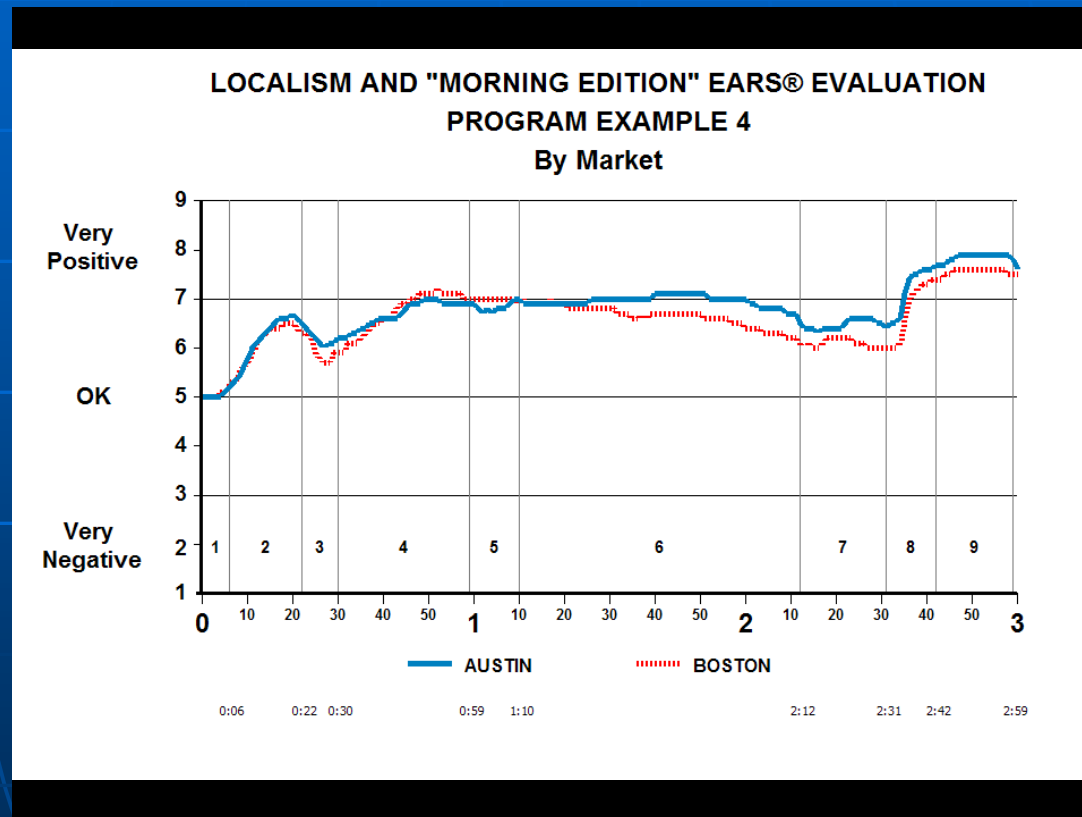
NPR Style

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NPR Style Newscast



Verbatims

- “NPR = facts plus authority.”
- “Story on weather damage to Washington park trails was very interesting. Had no idea it would cost so much to keep a nature trail open. Makes you wonder. I’d enjoy follow-up. It was also number heavy, which I like.”
- “I wanted even more information.”
- “I’d like a follow up.”
- “Little depth – I wanted more.”

Finding: Depth and More Depth

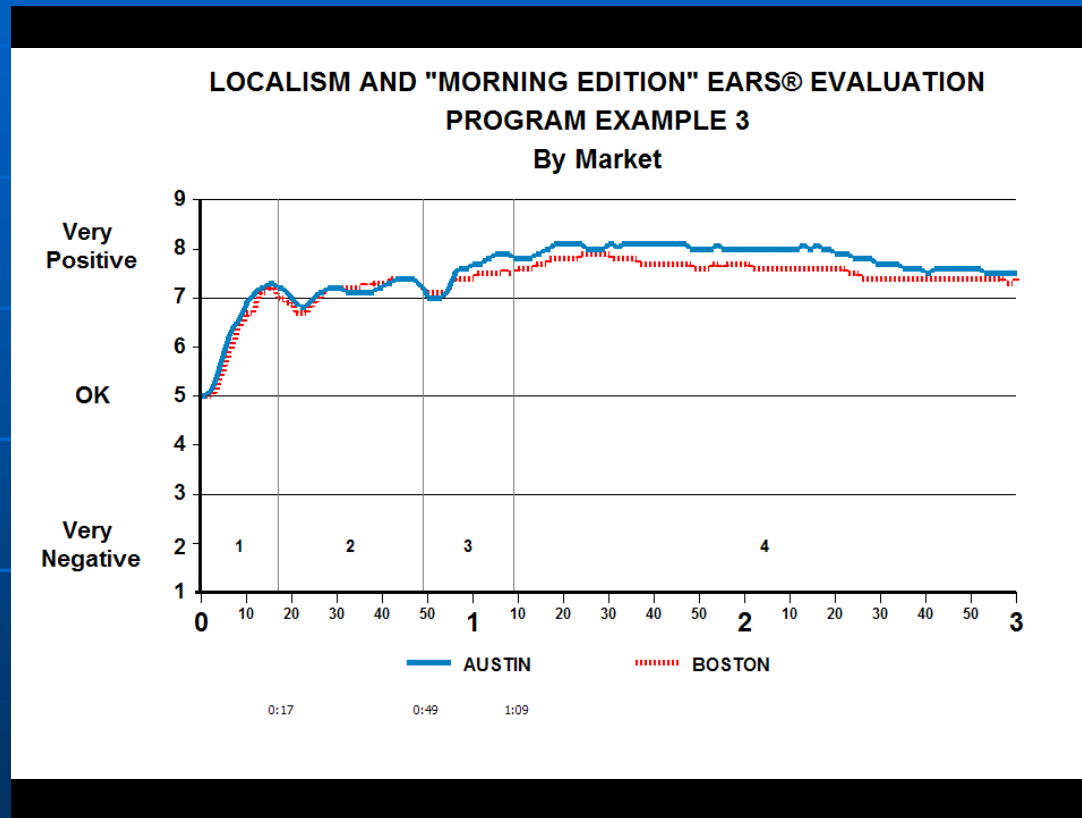
NPR listeners value depth above all else – factual information, intelligent analysis and a global perspective, even in a local newscast

Highest Value of All

Feature Newscast

“One story in depth”

Feature or In Depth Newscast



Verbatims

- “The piece on healthcare reform in Wisconsin was superb. It was balanced, clear, detailed, engaging and had a wonderful narrative flow.”
- “This explained the different sides of the debate and the issue was happening in the present time, so I as a citizen could take action based on the information I received in the story.”

Finding: Substance and Craft

Before the testing, we asked the MEGS faculty to rate each local newscast, break and segment on its level of craft

We found no relationship between craft and the value delivered to listeners

One PD's View

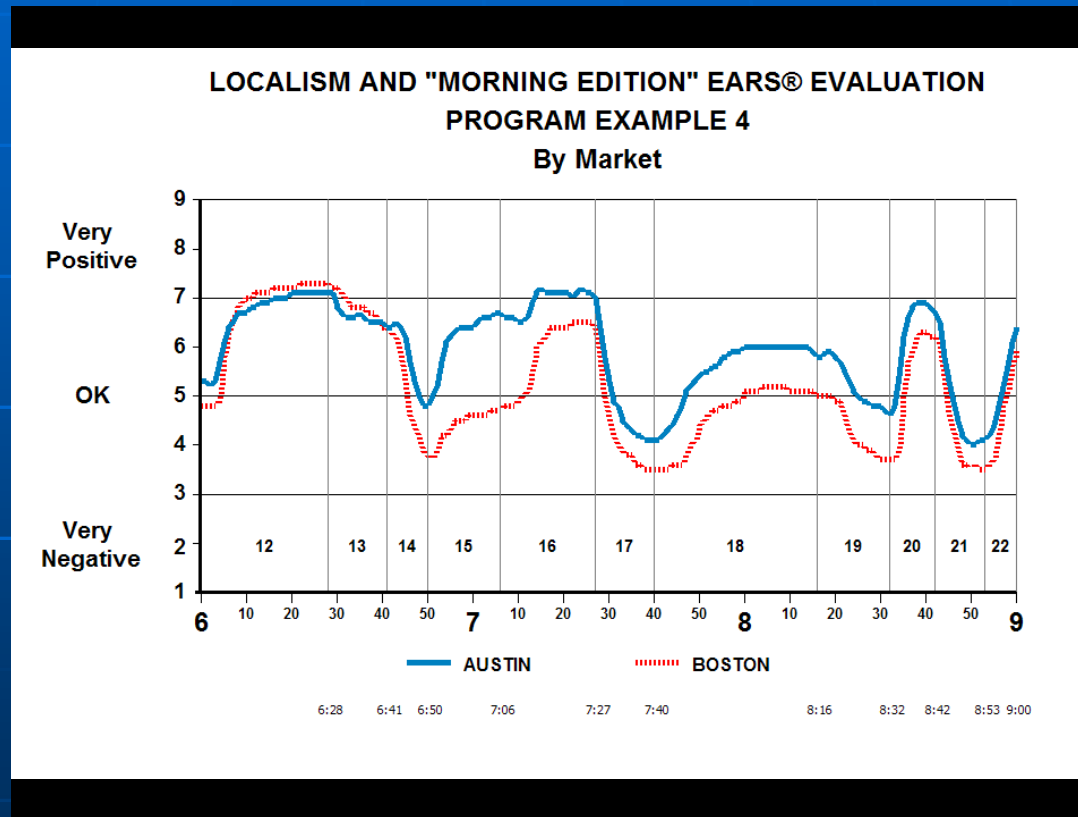
“Substance triumphs over craft.”

“We learned from Sense of Place that good writing is king, not ambient on-location sound or snappy production techniques. That may win contests, but not listeners.”

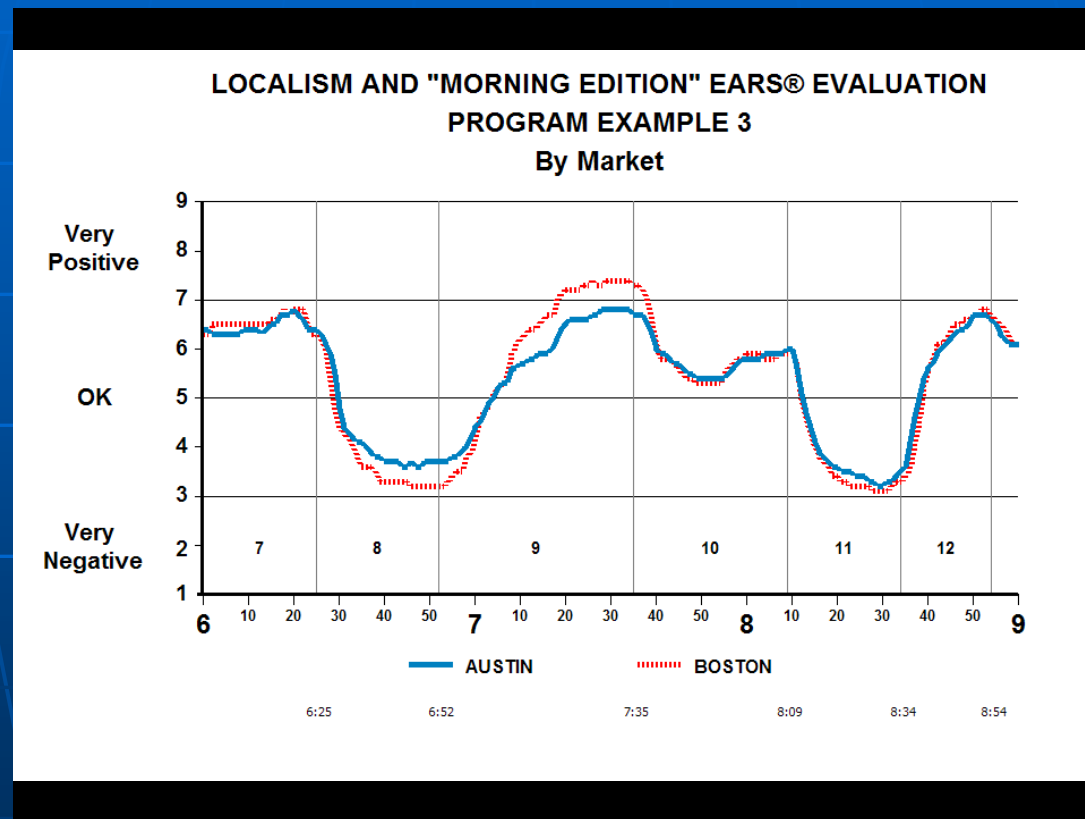
The Problem of Traffic

The Problem of Underwriting

Conversational Break



Bombastic Break



And now, here's Marcia !

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Action Points:

Headline vs In Depth Newscasts

- Listeners value a compelling topic or issue
- They value multiple viewpoints and angles
- If you add the amount of money public radio stations spend to produce headline newscasts and compare that with the low value listeners ascribe to them, you can't avoid concluding that we are squandering both resources and opportunity.

Action Points:

Value does not require Rich Sound

- Value begins in the selection of topic
- Value is added by the framing of the topic
- Multiple perspectives on the topic
- Clear writing, coherent organization and narrative flow

Action Points: Dump Traffic

- Traffic reports are not valuable to most public radio listeners
- They take up airtime that could be used for higher value content
- There is almost always a commercial station that delivers them more often and with greater accuracy

Action Points: Positioning Language

- “and now in local news”
- “coming up, the business news”
- “and in sports”

The Big Point: Core Values

In Core Values lingo, the Qualities of Heart/Spirit and the Qualities of Craft are important, but are both trumped by The Qualities of Mind

Download the full report and EARS videographs

WalrusResearch.com
LocalNewsInitiative.org

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