

Producing sponsored programmes

By Benson Idonije

A striking phenomenon which characterised sponsored programmes in those days was excellence. This was achieved through professional handling in terms of production.

Presenters and producers were specially selected and programme content was well researched and articulated. There was active involvement and participation; and the entire package smacked of finesse whether it was live or pre-recorded. But what is happening now is a far cry from the ideal and yet more than ever before advertisers are investing their money.

There is a corporate interview programme on NTA 2 Channel 5, called "Trial Blazers." The only good thing about it is that presenter has the ability always to attract interesting personalities to the programme. Last week, it featured source Magazine, Editor-in-Chief, Comfort Obi an award winning journalist who raked up the scoop on the notorious Anini, and the scandal that surrounded Umanah Umanah and his famous Resources Managers Finance House.

From all indications, here was an interview that had tremendous potentials for interesting viewing, but it was destroyed by the interviewer's overzealousness. She was so excited that instead of allowing Comfort to tell her own story she was filling in with vague and incoherent answers which distracted attention from the main focus and disrupted the flow of information. This unnecessary display of the knowledge of research left the entire programme with no aim as it was reduced to sound and fury, smiles and pictures.

Sponsored music programmes, on radio now received casual treatments, and apart from "Benson and hedges Golden Tones" I cannot put my finger on any other programme.

The "phone-in" device has become a substitute for proper planning compilation, scripting and presentation of sponsored programmes. Normally, this technique is seen as a live of least resistance, and a cheap day of filling air time. But its current indiscriminate use without any specifically achievable objective is reducing programmes to mere transmitter fodder which is not good enough for consumption.

Saturday morning on Ray Power 100FM usually promises to be entertaining but entertainment has to be planned and well coordinated to be meaningful. It started last week as usual with "Bournvita Special," a sponsored programme with telephone lines wide open for audience participation.

The topic for discussion, interspersed with music, was "sharing the same bed with your wife - advantages and disadvantages."

By implication, this topic presupposes that qualification for participation should be limited to married men who can pronounce on the issue from personal experience. But the programme allowed some unmarried men to contribute wild and unsubstantiated generalisations which could not be related to real life situations.

Besides, the whole programmes went on as a session of point, counter-point, arising from heated arguments between callers and studio presenters to the point that there was no victor, no vanquished. Everything was left in abeyance, without any resolution.

The right thing to do was to invite an expert to the studio to pronounce on the issue. And the expert in this case would be a man who has been married for decades, to bring his

experience to bear on the matter, or a sociologist of repute to look at the issue from the scientific as well as human view points.

"Bournvita Special" was followed by yet another sponsored programme with the 'phone-in' technique which established a discussion between studio presenters and callers without achieving any purposeful objective other than the fact that respondents felt happy and pleased with themselves that they had participated in a radio programme.

From all indications, neither of the presenters exhibited any experiential knowledge enough to provide the right answers to resolve most of the controversial issues raised.

Titled "Fanta Phone-in", the programme did not only drift aimlessly, presenters' approach was childish. The topic for discussion here was "Relationship" which by any stretch of imagination was too wide and amorphous to be discussed. Presenters often started by asking. "Tell us what you know about relationship)". And of course, not knowing where and how to start, respondents rambled into vagueries and generalisations without making any concrete point.

In order to provide something to bite into, the topic should have been specific, narrowing it down to a particular aspect of relationship which would in turn attract specific questions. As a matter of fact, the answer to that question is so wide that it could take five hours, far more than the duration of the programme itself to exhaust. The inputs made by callers just scratched the surface of the topic and confused the listener rather than enlighten him.

Another ridiculous example is "Satz and Jazz" which continues to reduce the creative efforts of musicians to light-heartedness by speaking over their music and failing to acknowledge the artistic musicianship of jazz men. Only the other day presenter was featuring the lives of Sonny Rollins on the same pedestal with grammy award winner and popular music exponent Baby Face. I found it rather absurd and unethical.

There are many more examples, but suffice it to say that a sponsored programme should not be seen only as an avenue for disseminating messages and commercials. The ethics of the profession should be observed in order to create the right awareness and image for advertised products, and more importantly build cognition for the advertiser as being associated with excellence, finesse and the best.