



14 Questions to Ask Yourself

Thought prompts for the manager planning a visual radio project

By Gary Kline

In an [earlier Visual Radio eBook](#), Gary Kline explored considerations for planning a serious video-ready facility at a radio operation. For this edition we asked him to review key high-level questions to ask yourself.

Kline is a [consultant](#) and former corporate director of engineering and broadcast IT for several U.S. radio companies, and often speaks to conference audiences and clients about facility design considerations.



1 *Why? Why are we getting into visual radio or video in the first place? We need to be able to articulate the reason, in part because it will help determine the gear we purchase. Are we going live? Are we only producing taped (on-demand) segments or video podcasts? Are we going to capture and produce content from outside the studio (remotes, client locations, third-party studios, concerts)?*

2 *What's the ultimate goal? Is this project about ratings improvement, building traffic for the station website, revenue, etc.? Knowing the goal(s) will help us determine which partners to seek out (video streaming providers, on-demand hosting, Facebook, YouTube Live, etc.)*

3 *Who are our stakeholders? An internal team of stakeholders should be assembled and meet regularly. Typically, this would include the station engineer, IT, PD, OM, sales manager and/or GM, digital director, legal, etc., creating a small group of station experts to guide the necessary activities for their respective departments. Otherwise, we may end up with video but no backend way to measure response through analytics and monetize it. Adding visual radio to the mix is not something just one person should be doing on their own; we also don't want a sales team selling a video package to a client that can't realistically (or budgetarily) be engineered; and we don't want to sign service contracts that were not reviewed by legal.*

4 *What can we realistically accomplish? Set expectations of what you want the finished product to look like and then weigh those versus budget, existing physical facilities, timeline and resources. Unless we are designing a new studio with visual radio in mind from the start, we are likely retrofitting an existing room to accommodate cameras. This usually requires careful thought. Otherwise we may end up with a boring camera shot that doesn't draw anyone's attention for long. Seek out articles written about studio design and best practices for video in the studio. For instance see our [previous article](#) on design considerations.*

5 *What resources will we need? Dovetailing with #4, pay careful attention to resources. There are resources needed to construct; but then there are resources to operate the video system. If we purchase a manual switcher and cameras that need operators, we've added something that requires staffing. If we intend to produce video content for several hours each day, all week long, across a couple of stations, we will have a bunch of people who need to be budgeted for (not to mention recruited). There are automatic switching systems that eliminate the need for video switching and camera operators. Each system and method of operation (manual, automatic, semi-automatic) has their pros and cons. Make sure to discuss all of this internally and, if helpful, seek outside experts*

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to determine what's best in your situation. In fact, if you have several studios, one solution and hardware package may work in one room while another is better in a different room. One size does not fit all. Therefore, it is so important to have a team of experts in the organization working together to establish the needs.



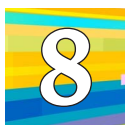
Do we understand the big picture? This encompasses not only the factors mentioned so far but

also longer-term plans for the facility and organization. Are we converting/building all our studios at once, or a few over time? Are dipping our toes into the world of video with one studio and then maybe some others later? And is this a project that might be expanded across other locations? The thing to keep in mind is always this: Am I buying anything today that will not be compatible with things I buy in the future? Am I doing anything now that will impede progress down the road? Am I putting myself into a corner? This could encompass studio layouts, camera choices, switcher choices, CDN providers, etc.



What changes can we anticipate? Nothing stays still very long in broadcast. After all our careful planning, discussions, reviews, installations and product showcasing,

there's still a good chance that things will change. Someone will complain about the lighting. Sales will ask for a feature we didn't plan on. We may be asked to produce content for a distributor we had not planned on (and now need special encoding for). Anything can happen. So don't fear change; expect it. Remember #6. Do your best to not lock yourself in with technology. For example, if you shop for a video switcher or software package and decide to save a few bucks by not purchasing an "advanced" version, make sure there's an "upgrade" path for later.



Do we understand video like we understand audio? Most of us in radio have been doing this for a while. We understand radio technology and everything audio. Our sales

team understands how to sell radio and NTR. They know how to sell the digital products our station or company offers. Video is in some ways similar; it's content, it's stored as a file on a computer, it's something that engages the audience. But there are differences too, in both technology and monetization. Seek help from trusted



Blair Garner, right, interviews Dierks Bentley and a shorter friend in the video-friendly studio of Westwood One's "The Blair Garner Show" at the NASH campus in Nashville.



Do we understand the required workflow necessary in our unique facility to produce and distribute our video content? I mentioned this briefly but it requires lots of thought.

Let's say we intend to produce 30 short videos a week and post them to Facebook, YouTube and our website. How will that happen? Who will do it? What's needed? We'll need video editing software, graphics capability, hardware capable of handling video production, easy-to-use upload widgets, etc. This will require part-time/full-time/contract employees depending on the needs and speed at which fresh content is expected to be posted. Do we have space (desks or workstations) allocated for these functions? If we produce live streaming content (morning or afternoon drive time), do we need staff to monitor or switch cameras/graphics during the broadcast? Will we incorporate Skype or remote video guests? What do we need? The good news is that there are visual radio systems available to do this today.



Have we identified our vendors? Do we know where to buy video gear? We want a vendor we trust who has the expertise to assist with decisions. What about software? Do we know the brands of the most popular packages (Final Cut, Adobe Premiere, etc.)? Do we know what those pieces of

software cost and how they are licensed? Something simple like a monthly cloud plan may require a credit card. Whose card will we use? Little details like this can hold things up. Do we know where we will purchase our lighting? Find a good vendor who can give some free and valuable advice on TV lighting, especially important in the age of HD.



How much storage will we need? How much video will we store? For how long? Will we store the final video output with graphics (the dirty feed)? Or will we also collect and store all the ISO camera feeds? That requires much more storage. Will we store video uncompressed or, say, in MPEG 4? Will we store locally or in the cloud? Think about this in the early stages. Again, consider expectations; include storage and retention of produced content as one of your talking points.



Have we considered media asset management? This is how we store data — sometimes a little, sometimes a lot — about recorded video and audio. It may be a simple description like “Billy Joel interview,” or it may be more detailed, even a full speech-to-text conversion so every single word can be searched for. Remember, down the road we may want to find that one time the local celebrity called into the morning show three years ago. We won’t remember the exact date or time, we just know they were on the air or stopped by the studio. We want to find it quickly. Better yet, our audience may want to find it. There are ways to make all this content searchable on Google and your website. Speech-to-text is big business now. It’s affordable and doable, even for a single station. There are visual radio systems that will convert everything to text automatically.



Who is running quality control? Make sure a QC manager is appointed to watch the content often. Is the produced product(s) of the quality you expected? How does it compare to other video content you may be competing with for the attention of the audience? How’s the lighting? Audio? Editing? Graphics? Camera angles? Load time? Searchability?



What will we do once our visual radio project is completed? Keep learning. Stay up to date on the latest technology, trends in video, and trends in digital strategy; most of all, keep an open mind. Every month there are new products announced that could make your life, or the lives of your colleagues, easier, through greater efficiency, faster production, higher quality. You may read about how a station is using visual radio to do great things; it might be anywhere in the world. Ask whether your setup could do the same thing or if it would need modifications or upgrades. Share the story with your original team including the general and sales managers. Watch the produced content as often as you have time. Remain engaged. ■

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