



Don't Pay for Radio Interviews

By Joan Stewart

It used to be that all an author had to do was pitch a great idea with a clever hook, and you'd be booked as a guest on a half-hour radio show.

These days, however, hang onto your wallet. A new breed of radio host is insisting that guests fork over a few hundred dollars-sometimes more-for the "privilege" of being on their show. Some guests, desperate for exposure for a new book or project, willingly pay the money. Then they're disappointed when they get little feedback from listeners, or the show leads to no product sales.

There's nothing wrong with the concept of paying money for airtime. But there's a name for it. It's called advertising. Joe Sabah, author of the book *HOW TO GET ON RADIO TALK SHOWS ALL ACROSS AMERICA*, says that if you want a legitimate interview, no money should change hands.

"With more than 740 radio shows all over the country willing to book guests for free, there's absolutely no reason why anybody should have to pay," Sabah said.

A different twist on the same theme involves a radio station approaching someone and offering them their own weekly show on a particular topic, then telling them they must charge guests to appear. That means that if a host comes across someone who they think would be a great guest, they can't book them if the guest can't afford to pay. Why, suddenly, are some radio interviews no longer free?

The radio industry has been going through sweeping changes in the last several years, with many stations being bought or sold for hefty amounts, and that means they're trying to entice people like you into paying the freight.

Joann McCall has an interesting perspective on the problem. As president of McCall Public Relations in Portland, Oregon, she specializes in generating publicity for authors. She also has been a radio host, interviewer and newscaster for 18 years and hosts a radio show with her partner, Debb Janes, called "Janes McCall & Co.," on KKSJ radio in Portland.

McCall says the practice of charging guests has become acceptable-even though it isn't right.

"Having someone approach you to pay for an interview is like buying a radio infomercial," she said.

McCall was once approached by an unsuspecting "programmer" who said he worked for a network of stations and offered to give her client a radio show for \$5,000 a month. As soon as advertisers were attracted to the show and paid for commercial time, there would be no charge.

"I told him he had to be kidding," she said. "As soon as the programmer figured out I knew the business, he backed way down."

Turns out his "network" consisted of only two stations.

McCall advises that guests don't pay. Instead, when you hear a sales pitch, simply reply, "Pay for an interview? I don't need to. Thanks anyway."

If you choose to do it, McCall advises, make sure you know what kind of results you are likely to get. Have the "programmer" (i.e. sales person) give you names and phone numbers of others who have bought airtime. Then call those people and ask them about their experiences on the show. Ask how much money they made in product sales, how many phone calls they got from listeners if it was a call-in show, and whether they would do it again for the same amount of money.

McCall cautions that aggressive, pay-for-interview "hosts" will probably be on the upswing because there are more low-powered FM stations on the horizon. "Don't be bullied by these people," she said.

Joan Stewart publishes The Publicity Hound, a bi-monthly subscription newsletter featuring "tips, tricks and tools for free (or really cheap) publicity."

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