The Source

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TechTalk with Tom Coviak

Signs, sines -- everywhere signs/sines. Have you tested the signs/sines?

First impressions are crucial.
That's why strategic placement of the signs announcing your Traveler Information System (TIS) is key to its success. Signs in the wrong place perpetuate the frustration many listeners have with AM radio. If your signs are positioned poorly in relation to your "sines," radio waves, motorists are likely to think your station is not working and might be tempted to tune out. In these situations, would-be listeners often will not try retuning, even when they reach a stronger signal.

Action plan for positioning signs:
1 Before settling on where to place signs, install your TIS station and have it operating at legal field strength, so you can test locations under real-life working conditions.
2 Drive through your TIS coverage zone with different vehicles; range is determined partly by the types of receivers in different cars.
3 Make note of where your TIS
4 Use the average taken from these tests to select sign sites.

Remember to consider your particular environ. Check for interference in reception quality (of your "sines") at least once a year, especially in the vicinity of large cities.

Commercial stations can change frequency, or a new station might develop in your city that causes interference to your TIS. Commercial stations are generally 1,000 to 50,000 watts. Yours TIS has a 10-watt maximum. The bigger "sine" will always be in the foreground on passing receivers.
On the other hand, rural sites tend to have broader ranges simply because the AM band there tends to be less crowded with fewer interfering physical structures. It's a good idea to run separate listening tests for separate transmitter sites, when you have more than one. For instance, one site may be easily heard at 3 miles to the east and 4 miles to the west. Another may be heard at 5 miles to the north but only 3 miles to the south. Signs are usually positioned 3 to 5 miles from the TIS site(s), so travelers cruising along at 60 miles per hour can hear low-power messages clearly for about 6 minutes. On the whole, one of the best ways to ensure that the public actually hears the useful highway, weather, emergency and/or visitor information your TIS provides is proper placement of the signs announcing the station.

Questions? Comments? Contact Tom, ISS technical consultant: tom@theRADIOsource.com.