

Runanga radio lures the listeners

by Piripi Walker

Two recent ventures in Maori broadcasting have been so successful that they are worth special attention.

One has been a trial in Maori metropolitan radio. That's Te Reo o Poneke. And the other — Te Reo o Raukawa — has been an experiment in runanga radio.

Briefly, this is what they've done so far.

Te Reo o Poneke

Te Reo o Poneke 89 FM was the first Maori radio station ever to operate using only Maori as a broadcasting language. It broadcast in August 1983 for five days, using equipment and studios provided by the student station, Radio Active.

The operators of the station, Nga Kaiwhakapumau I Te Reo, also ran Te Reo o Poneke in 1984 for two days on AM, and in 1985 for seven mornings, on FM, again at Radio Active. The AM broadcast in 1984 was made possible through the availability of the AM transmitter on the YB frequency 783 kHz, belonging to Radio New Zealand.

The station broadcast to an urban Maori audience (although the YB broadcast in 1984 reached the whole of the southern North Island) and tried to cater for all age groups.

Te Reo o Raukawa

This was the first regional radio station to use Maori as a senior (90%) broadcasting language. The tribal short-term station at Tauranga in July 1984 was the first runanga-based station as such. That station ran for seven days on AM.

Te Reo o Raukawa 91 FM broadcast for 16 hours per day for 10 days in the May holidays in 1985 to all age groups, aiming specifically at the Maori population in the Horowhenua and Manawatu. The language used for 14 out of 16 hours per day was Maori.

It had a second three-week broadcast in February/March 1986 for 12 hours per day. The operator of the station was Te Wananga o Raukawa (the university

at Otaki). Students, teachers and young tribal members of the area made up the staff of 40.

Did they work?

The response to both stations has been so positive that the broadcasters know they were on target.

And the successes are these:

- The right decision on language choice. We didn't aim to run a bilingual station to please non-Maori speakers. This only serves to alienate Maori speakers, and learners, who are the target audience. All listeners are instant learners.
- Recognition that Maori language as a broadcasting language on a community station is exciting. Young Maori staff on Te Reo o Raukawa stayed up until morning making commercials in Maori, because it was fun and it felt good. This wouldn't have happened if the commercials were only in plain old English, in my view.
- No one turned off. Almost no one who turned on the radio and couldn't understand the language seemed to reject the sound. Maori and Pakeha alike said they were hearing the sound of their own country, produced by Maori people in a modern entertaining idiom.
- The management was based on tikananga Maori. Young and old, all Maori people prefer this to a blend of Maori and Pakeha, however that might be achieved.
- The fact of Maori management and a Maori language regime meant that being Maori was a basis of staff identification with the station. To be Maori was to belong on these stations.
- The recruitment and training system began among local people, with flexibility. Young people were excused their imperfect language and were still encouraged to become on-air performers. Some have gone on to achieve fluency as Maori speakers.
- The Pakeha groups (Radio Active, Access Radio, Wellington Missionary Radio Fellowship) were suppor-

tive and sensitive. These groups now have strong links to Maori broadcasters as a result.

- Popular music, including top 40, but with a commitment to Maori music. People complained when we played too much Pakeha music.
- Talk programming on a wide variety of issues, with constant effort to find vigorous on-air performers. Plenty of time given to humour sessions, interviews and visitors.
- Access to Radio New Zealand recorded Maori music and programmes. Radio New Zealand has provided a good deal of programmes for these stations.
- Secondment of professional staff, including the writer, from Radio New Zealand.
- Part of the excitement seen on these stations was the knowledge that a Maori initiative was developing a model that will be a permanent feature of our lives in the future. A Maori radio station has been tried and found to work well.

What are the implications?

Two years ago, in a report on Te Reo o Poneke, I said radio broadcasting was so basic in our lives that it could swing the verdict of the people on the relevance of a language.

"If a language is seen as having a small or degenerating use then it will suffer. Put the language on its own frequency and its mana will increase, along with the number of speakers."

"Two years and four radio stations later, my opinion is the same."

In my time in broadcasting I have been struck again and again by the number of obstacles placed in the way of the Maori broadcaster and the audience. Almost all of the Maori broadcasting models are defective, and the structures within which they operate generate despair and frustration.

As a relatively young person hoping to work in broadcasting through the medium of the Maori language, I started to think about why everything always seemed to go awry.

Te Reo o Poneke and other stations