



RMF FM

Commercial radio has come on in leaps and bounds in Poland and this broadcaster has blazed the trail with its ambition and technology. ZENON SCHOEPE travels to historic Krakow.

FOR THOSE OF US old enough to remember the Cold War and the Wall it is still difficult to view business in the former Eastern Bloc countries without throwing in a reference to the fact that most commercial and free-enterprise progress has been made only in the last 15 years. It's therefore refreshing and rewarding to see operations that have not just done well but have changed the face of their market through their influence. Radio is a case in point and the story of Polish broadcaster RMF FM encapsulates all that became possible after 1989.

But then it is a station of firsts. It prides itself on having broken the State's monopoly in mass media, having established a commercial radio network, and for implementing modern radio technology. Brainchild of entrepreneur Stanislaw Tyczynski who started the first local commercial radio station in 1989 in Krakow — significantly to be away from the centralisation of the capital Warsaw — RMF FM started broadcasting in 1990. It was broadcasting via satellite in 1992 and

delivered its first 'live' broadcast into the US in 1993. RMF FM was granted the first country-wide radio licence in 1994 and the following year it launched its first country-wide concert tour — a 1km-long convoy and 60 cities. In the year 2000 its Megafestival celebrated the station's tenth anniversary and in 2004 the Broker FM Group, which is the holding company, was quoted on the Warsaw stock exchange.

RMF FM is the largest radio station in Poland and enjoys the largest share in the advertising market.

Thanks to 47 broadcasting points it achieves coverage of some 95% of Poland. RMF FM is additionally accessible via satellite, through the Internet, and it is even rebroadcasted in Chicago for the local Polish community. The station broadcasts music and news programming 24 hours a day and its news is also accessible via the Internet and through WAP.

It claims 22 millions listeners weekly, 8 million daily and boasts a listener profile of educated city-based active consumers between the ages of 20-39.

To put these claims into perspective, RMF FM claims some 22% of the audience share, which represents by far the largest chunk of any one operator in Poland.

It has 300 employees and claims to be the quickest and most reliable independent source of information in the country. A network of correspondents — located in Poland and around the world — relay information to the station's listeners. They have reported from Kosovo, Afghanistan and were in Baghdad at the time of the war — apparently they were the only Polish reporters there.

From its very beginning RMF FM saw the potential that 'events' offered to those who had their own marketing and promotional vehicle. Its strategy has always included the organisation and sponsoring of large events, such as concerts, tours and one-off spectacles. It takes the credit for the largest ever music event in Poland (700,000 and the Scorpions) and has co-organised the Polish legs of super-band international tours.

Its station has an advanced digital studio infrastructure but its boffins have been testing and implementing the sort of multimedia technologies necessary to change its business concept in the future. This technology aspect has been reinforced by the construction of a 'Multimedia Factory' some 30km outside Krakow. Described as the largest media facility in Europe — I've only seen pictures of it — it looks like something out of a sci-fi Martian landscape with a mass of interconnected 'monolithic pods' spread over a huge plot. [see the picture; that's apparently the real

thing not a model.] The pods house production areas and are likely to be used for the diversification of the company's activities. Television seems like a natural evolution for the organisation and RMF FM recently applied for a satellite TV channel licence.

With this talk of the future it's important not to overlook the core business of radio. Headquartered in a pleasant old building right next to the tourist attraction of Krakow's Kosciuszko Mound, the facilities have grown in line with the broadcaster's activities. It delivers RMF FM playing hot adult contemporary, RMF Classic playing mostly classical and soundtracks, and RMF Max, which started less than a year ago for contemporary hit radio. There are three studios for RMF FM, two for Classic and one for Max all arranged on the first floor.

However, it's the station's recording studio that is of most interest and it runs Pro Tools with a smattering of sensible outboard through Genelec 1038s and has a dedicated live room.

RMF FM engineer Lukasz Myszkal picks up the story. 'This room was originally a recording studio designed for music,' he says. 'It was built ten years ago and was mainly used for recording jingles for RMF FM.' However, things changed suddenly when the management decided it wanted to differentiate the station and started buying its jingles from Los Angeles. The room was then pressed into service for the remixing and remastering of those jingles but because the studio wasn't fully occupied it was also hired out on a commercial basis. With the expansion in the number of channels this studio and a similar but smaller control room across the corridor from it were pressed into service for promos, commercials and taking care of station imaging.

The room has an interesting layout with a type of raised gallery area running around the back, while at the front — recessed into the floor — is the window into the live room. The recording area is not especially high but it is usefully long and wide to yield a creatively useful space big enough for a band.

Lukasz inherited the Genelecs but loves them and believes that like everything else at the station the quality to price ratio was paramount at the time of the purchase and they were chosen as the best buy for the investment. The control room houses a very

old Tactile Technologies mixer used purely as a means of monitoring the output of Lukasz's Pro Tools as he now does all his mixing in the box.

Lukasz has been with RMF FM for almost two years having been head-hunted from a rival radio station where he was in charge of imaging and the sound ID as well as doing promos and commercials for the contemporary hit radio channel. The call came as RMF was starting the build up to its own CHR Max channel launch. He's delighted with his working environment saying that the studio at his former station was as small as his bathroom. The studios have to be manned for 20 hours every day and two engineers per room cover the 9am to 12 midnight stretch. Lukasz clearly keeps extremely busy. ■

