

Getting a bite on the market

Smile Radio provides easy listening for dental offices

BY YESENIA ROBLES
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Smile Radio aims to keep dentists and their patients smiling by giving them something new to listen to.

Boulder company Custom Channels last spring launched Smile Radio — a line of music channels — tailored just for them.

"We provide an alternative by having professionally programmed channels that we maintain for them," said Dave Rahn, co-founder of Custom Channels and co-creator of Smile Radio. "Unlike radio, there are no commercials or a lot of DJ talk, and unlike satellite, we stream for inappropriate content and music that doesn't fit."

Smile Radio has more than 20 local subscribers, and a "few more outside the area," Rahn said. The music is streamed via the Internet.

Rahn said Custom Channels may create new lines for other industries.

"This was just a way to continue to grow our opportunities for Custom Channels," he said. "The business strategy fits with the media landscape of today's Internet digital age, where people are used to having some level of customization."

Rahn has family members and friends who are dentists. But he also chose that field because it includes both independent and franchised businesses.

"The opportunity we have is to work with some of the dental marketing groups," Rahn said. "There are companies that are sort of brands that work with many franchised dentists, so on any given day you could quadruple your business by getting in with the right group."

The challenge of finding something to tie together many smaller independents' needs also appealed to the company.

It took Custom Channels two or three months to create the musical lines. Employees screened thousands of songs for inappropriate words. They also listened for tone and tempo, so that the music was "not too sleepy and slow, but also not too edgy or inappropriate," Rahn said.

"It is somewhat subjective, but we asked ourselves, would we want to listen to this while sitting in a dentist chair?" he said. "We err on the side of caution."

The company tried to choose music that eases the anxiety some patients feel in going to a dental office. "Many people believe it does help relax some people," Rahn said.

Office manager Amanda Schnell said Smile Radio music relaxes patients at Park Meadows Orthodontics and puts them in a good mood.

"Patients are often seen singing and dancing," Schnell said. "We do the pop station, which I don't think a lot of offices do because it's not as relaxing, it's more fun. It makes for a fun environment."

Custom Channels is expanding the dentists' line after taking suggestions from clients and prospects. Rahn said he expects to reach about 20 channels for Smile Radio. One addition may be a channel featuring relaxation sounds, similar to a spa.

Subscriptions cost \$39.99 a month, and that includes all three music licenses required to play copyrighted music in a business establishment.

Rahn has found that many small business owners using their iPod or other personal music aren't aware that they need licenses to play the music at their business.

"It's actually pretty common," Rahn said. "And I've also noticed these agencies stepping up their enforcements."

He said the convenience of including those three licenses in the Smile Radio package appeals to customers.



Regardless of what does appeal to them, he said feedback has been positive.

"We've been quite happy with the special channels," said Lisa Guinther, office manager at SmileLogic in Broomfield, one of Smile Radio's clients. "Especially not having to listen to all the commercials and the DJs."

Previously, SmileLogic tuned in to a local radio station. Guinther also said employees enjoy being able to change the channels with their moods.



Custom Channels' music licenses allow it to sell its service only in the United States. But if it sees enough demand, it would look into expanding sales to other countries.

The line includes 14 themed channels, such as adult rock, including music by Coldplay, Bob Marley and Elvis Costello; symphony music; country; and one that plays the latest hits mixed with some from the 1980s, with such artists as The Fray, Kelly Clarkson and Rob Thomas.

Rahn and John Bradley with SBR Creative Media of Boulder first offered the music customization, online, in 1999. In 2007, SBR created Custom Channels, which customized music channels for businesses such as Whole Foods Market, Chipotle Mexican Grill and Floyd's 99 Barbershops.

But the dentists' line is Custom Channels' first one that's specific to an industry rather than a single business. Once Smile Radio has been fully established,

DETAILS

Custom Channels

Owners: Dave Rahn and John Bradley

Headquarters: 7464 Arapahoe Road, Suite B-4, Boulder, Colo. 80303

Phone: 303-444-7700

Online: www.customchannels.net

Employees: 5

DETAILS

Smile Radio's 14 channels:

1. Smile One — Today's hits mixed with some from the 1980s.
2. Lite Smile — Soft rock and lite pop.
3. Classic Rock Smile — From the 1960s through 1980s.
4. Adult Rock Smile — Rock and adult alternative.
5. Eclectic Smile — Mix of rock, reggae, jazz, blues.
6. Shuffle Smile — Energetic mix of rock, pop, oldies, and today's hits.
7. Good Times Smile — Oldies from 1950s through 1970s.
8. Pop Smile — Popular rock, R&B and pop.
9. Soul Smile — R&B and disco hits of 1960s and 1970s.
10. Jazzy Smile
11. Country Smile
12. Symphony Smile
13. Swingin' Lounge — Contemporary and oldies swing.
14. Santa's Smile: Christmas music.

"If we were not getting good feedback, then nothing else matters," Rahn said. "But the path we're on, we're feeling pretty good about."

Rahn said his company is considering including options for companies to further customize their channels with their own commercials. He expects to unveil that option in January at the Rocky Mountain Dental Convention at the Colorado Convention Center.