




## Is it really time for Chennai FM stations to reinvent themselves?

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Chennai FM stations perhaps are the only ones in the country to have strong language protocols airing 'Tamil only' content. RAM has still not made its way here, but going by the research by individual FM stations, that is what supposedly works here. But lately, some stations here have taken to experimenting with content.

Hello FM from the Malar Group of Publications has recently come up with a time band where they air a non-music programme with English content. The programme is called 'Slam' and the station has roped in veteran radio presenter Niladri Bose for the show.

Speaking about the show, Bose said, "The show deals with topical issues. This show is a departure from the regular shows on the channel and is a little bolder, brighter and more serious-natured in content. On the show, listeners get a chance to talk, to debate, and to ideate. The whole idea behind the show is to give something more to the Chennai public apart from Kollywood, Bollywood and Hollywood. We are not doing current affairs and are keeping the content within the guidelines."

Whether this new experimentation with content is going to work for the Chennai audience is debatable.

Harinarayanan, Senior Manager – Marketing, Radio Mirchi Chennai, said, "We do not have any plans for exploring any non-Tamil content as of now. A recent research conducted by us revealed that a majority of Chennaiites prefer only Tamil songs. The market for English and non-Tamil music is very miniscule and niche."

An official source from Big FM Chennai also commented that they did not have any plans for such experimentation through English content in the near future.

To the question on what made Hello FM take up the challenge of coming up with talk shows and that too in English, Bose replied, "Chennai has been ready for English content for a long time, just that you need people to sell it. There is a niche crowd for this content, but at least you are assured of that group of loyal listeners."

He further said, "What we need is to be more mature in what we are dishing out

to our listeners. In a given time band, we need to have a more balanced mix. There can also be talk shows in Tamil and not necessarily in English. When Radio Mirchi was launched in Chennai, they were different then. Everybody followed suit and nobody is different now. So, when one starts something new, it is different. But if it picks up and one is able to sell the concept, that will make the difference happen.”

**Ashok R Sankethi**, CEO, Kaybase, a Chennai-based market research company, said, “I think there are decent-sized audience segments for different kinds of programmes, and it is wrong to assume that English or Hindi programmes won’t work in Chennai. For that matter, I think even non-music based programmes aimed at family audiences would work quite well.”

An upbeat Bose added, “It is high time to reinvent oneself here, and we have to move on from the same ‘nautanki’ that we have been doing for six years and take it to the next level. Only that will mature radio as a medium.”

Whether non-music shows and other experimentation in content are going to work for Chennai, whether it is a case typical of Chennai or whether it applies to FM stations elsewhere in the country, will become a matter of discussion for our future reports.