

A Foolproof prank for WBRU

Bogus 'Buddy FM' format change rocked fans in April Fool's stunt

Here's a lesson for you: Never believe what's coming out of your radio on (or around) April Fool's Day.

The latest prankster on the dial was alternative rock station WBRU-FM, which over the weekend caused a stir by pretending it had been sold and adopting a weird new format called Buddy FM.

The station went to elaborate lengths to carry off the hoax, planting items on the Internet and having its DJs conduct a long, mournful farewell on Friday afternoon.

Channel 10 took the bait, leading its 11 p.m. newscast Thursday with the news that the station might be sold.

ANDY SMITH



The station's news crew tried, but failed, to gain access to the 'BRU studios on Benevolent Street and interviewed young people on the East Side about WBRU's fate.

True, Channel 10 qualified the story with the phrase "If it's true," but the prominent placement of the story at the top of the

SEE **THE JOKE, G3**



JOURNAL PHOTO / BILL MURPHY

WBRU program director Seth Resler listens to caller complaints Friday morning as rumors spread about the station's sale and format change that day.

The joke was on fans in 'BRU stunt

Continued from Page G1

newscast gave the hoax a lot of momentum.

"The facts of the story were correct," said Channel 10 spokesperson Clare Eckert yesterday afternoon. "My face is a little pink." Eckert said the TV station planned to run an update on WBRU last night.

Channel 12's general manager Jay Howell said his station did not go with the story; Channel 6 ran a brief item Saturday after Buddy FM had been revealed as a hoax.

WBRU program director Seth Resler said the station tries to do something silly every April 1. Last year it was a benefit for discjocularitis, a tragic disease in which children are born without a sense of humor.

"The response this year was bigger than we expected," Resler said.

WBRU planted items about its sale, written under a pen name, in the online editions of Motif magazine, which covers arts and entertainment.

Motif editor Jim Vickers said he was willing to go along — only in the online versions of Motif, which is also in print every two weeks — because he knew that in a few days the joke would be revealed.

And because it was fun.

"We had a great time doing this," he said.

WBRU is a commercial station that uses Brown University students as its on-air talent, although it has full-time employees in management and sales positions. Last week everyone connected with the station was resolute in declining to comment on the swirling rumors that the station was changing hands. There was a

tantalizing clue on the station's own Web site, a note thanking the station's dedicated listeners for their support.

Friday afternoon the station's DJ was milking the joke for all it was worth. There was lots of reminiscing about all the great times and great music. Local band Zox phoned in to thank the station for its support.

So did Dickie Barrett, lead singer of the Mighty Mighty Bosstones, who fondly remembered a video shoot the Bosstones did on the roof of the Biltmore hotel. (Only it never really happened.)

At 5 p.m., there was 30 seconds of static, and a voice announced the new Buddy FM.

The new format was a bizarre musical mishmash, from Johnny Cash to Black Sabbath to Celine Dion to the Village People. "We tried to get more and more absurd as we went along," Resler said.

(Actually Buddy FM was far more daring, in its very weird way, than anything else on the radio. You truly didn't know what you'd hear next.)

Was Resler worried Buddy FM would drive away WBRU's listeners?

"No, it was like watching a car crash," Resler said. "People tuned in just to see what would happen."

A little after noon on Saturday, the station was "retaken" by rebel DJs and an angry crowd — recorded crowd noise, to be more precise — of listeners.

Rich Lupo, owner of Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel, supposedly bought the station from its mysterious corporate masters and donated it back to the original owners.

Buddy FM is part of a long tradition of April Fool hoaxes

on Rhode Island radio.

In 1986, WHJY's Carolyn Fox announced that the city of Providence was closed, and everyone should go home.

In 1991, WHJY's morning team of Paul & Al revealed that Michael Jackson had bought the station, which would be playing all Michael, all the time.

Even broadcasting icon Salty Brine gave in to April Fool temptation in 1992, announcing that the fictional Rhode Island Pipe Authority was advising citizens not to use tap water so that a high-pressure concentration of chlorine could be blown through the pipes.

Listeners were advised to stay clear of faucets and appliances during the potentially dangerous "blow-by."