

Broadcast Spawning: Creating a new generation of anglers across the airwaves

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As a fully-fledged sports nut – I listen, I watch, I play, I coach, I officiate – I regularly find inspiration from those that are successful in sports. Bobby Unser, an automobile racer whose family has won the Indy 500 a record 9 times, once said,

“Success is where preparation and opportunity meet.”



How does this relate to fisheries? Well let me tell you in a story about how an opportunity to communicate fishing tips and fisheries science to the public became reality through hard work and preparation.

Ultimately, it took a means, a method, and a message to be successful.

The Means

Audio broadcasts, be it radio or podcasts, are a great means for communicating – especially when you have a face for radio like mine! Talking on the radio about fishing has been popular across North America on local broadcasts for eons. Some of my peers in Iowa, where I live, have been doing it for years, providing local fishing information on local shows. Additionally, InFisherman has a variety of media outlets that share fishing information as well as other outdoors shows on radio and TV that inform while filling marginal time slots.

I always thought when hearing these “filler bits” that there was a need for something more...a chance for stories and knowledge to be told from real insiders. I thought about it for a while and finally found an opportunity to express my thoughts to people who could do something about it.

As I often do, I was tuned to my local sports talk radio show, and I heard the regular sports guys chatting about a fishing trip they had made to Lake of the Woods. I was acquainted with one of the two hosts, because he works

extensively with my beloved Iowa State University (ISU) Cyclones. That day I found out that they both cared about fishing, so I started to prepare my angle for when the opportunity to be face-to-face arose. I knew that if I could share my idea with them, it would be a fantastic opportunity to share a message about fish and fishing with a large audience – their radio show is the #1 afternoon drive-time program in Iowa's biggest media market.

The opportunity eventually came at a large trivia event sponsored by ISU Athletics. It is an event I try to attend annually, and it just so happened that year that both of the radio hosts would be there, too. I wandered up to their table (one of over 100 at the event), beverage in hand, and introduced myself. I mentioned that I was a fish guy, and if they ever wanted to do a segment on fishing (especially during the summer sports lull), I would be happy to participate. Over the next few months, we emailed back and forth, and finally found a time that would work.

For our first live interview, we talked about local fishing opportunities, and it went really well. The setting was perfect: we were broadcasting from a bar, and it was just like any other pair of buddies talking about fishing. After a few more successful iterations, I knew that the means had been found. We decided to formalize our chats into a monthly podcast that could be distributed as a stand-alone program or plugged into a segment on their show. That was in 2016.

The Method

The main reason for the continued success of the monthly program, I believe, is the method, which I have already been hinted at. It's Casual. Comfortable. We make it seem like the listeners are right there with us around a campfire or at a corner establishment.

Why not think about how you could integrate something like this in your region: Make it fun and entertaining, but also informative and relevant. What is biting? Where should I go fishing? Any special opportunities? Bring out your passion, and people can tell. It draws them in. The normal trio of myself, Ross Peterson (the radio guy), and Tyler Stubbs (Iowa DNR Community Fishing Biologist) seem to have found a sweet spot doing this.

The Message

The message is important, vitally important. You have to have something worth talking about, or people won't listen. Iowa DNR provides a weekly

fishing report to our anglers, and has been doing so for decades. In the beginning, I sat down with our staff and made a monthly list of what to fish for each month, and where. This provides a base for conversation, and then we add to it with the opening of fishing seasons, special stocking events, tidbits we have heard about a “hot bite”, etc. Ross was headed to Lake of the Woods for his annual walleye trip, so we have talked about why there are slot limits. Walleye broodstock collection is coming up, so we talked about closed seasons and other length limits. Over the years we have started adding special guests, too. A local musky guide, regional biologists, a guy that helps parents teach kids to fish. A biologist who has an annual “50” goal - different species of fish, bodies of water, counties, ponds. A [podcast](#) with a Lake Michigan biologist after we read Howard Tanner’s book “Something Spectacular: My Great Lakes Salmon Story”. State record (and I believe soon world record) triploid brown trout from Lake Taneycomo in Missouri, so we talked to the hatchery manager about that stocking program (this [one](#) starts with a conversation with a musky tournament angler). Our most recent [podcast](#) included Iowa’s fish chief, Joe Larscheid, talking about COVID-19 impacts on fishing in Iowa, and Minnesota’s fish chief Brad Parsons talking about new panfish regulations and Mille Lacs. Your fisheries network is a treasure trove of people with interesting stories and projects that they love to talk about, and the public loves to hear about. Use your resources!

The Success

Each month, the link to the podcast gets distributed by the radio station, iHeart media, along with the Iowa DNR’s weekly fishing report. We have thousands of downloads every month. So far, so good! A means, a method, and a message through preparation and execution when an opportunity presented itself. This was my recipe for success. What is your recipe for success?

I think the Coen Brothers said it well in the movie Oh Brother, Where Art Thou, when Pappy O’Daniel exclaimed, “[We ain't one-at-a-timin' here. We're MASS communicating!](#)”

Jeff Kopaska is the Biometrician for Fisheries for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and is currently the President of the North Central Division of the American Fisheries Society. He also co-hosts a popular monthly podcast (and occasional radio programs) on KXNO that discuss timely fishing and fisheries science topics. His areas of expertise are fisheries data and

analysis, water quality, applications of technology to natural resources challenges, and human dimensions of natural resource management.

