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Executive Profile

John Decker, Director of Radio Programming KPBS-FM

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John Decker, programming director at KPBS-FM, started his career in public broadcasting purely by accident. While a student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Decker was looking for a job to offset his bills. His aunt put him in touch with a friend who was working at the local public radio station and suddenly he found himself hosting his own show. After college Decker moved to Los Angeles and pursued other interests before relocating to San Diego and returning to public broadcasting. Seven years ago he began his career with KPBS-FM as an announcer, moved into operations, and has been programming director for the last four years. "It's been a great ride so far and I don't see it ending because this is the type of place that keeps moving. We've got a lot of irons in the fire, a lot of new projects coming up and it's just a great atmosphere," Decker said.

As programming director, it's Decker's job to choose the programs for KPBS Radio. Aside from locally produced programming like *The Lounge*, *A Way with Words*, *These Days*, *Film Club of the Air* and *At the Opera with Ian Campbell*, Decker also must choose from several programs produced by NPR.

"Our first litmus test is whether I think it's going to pass muster with the audience," Decker said. "Our primary demographic is 35-54 year old educated folks. That education is key. The highest common denominator of our audience is education and curiosity."

For a program to pass muster with Decker, it must first and foremost be engaging and then have the ability to hold the audience's attention. KPBS-FM listeners have a voracious appetite for knowledge. They are constantly looking to learn something new, hear a different perspective, or discover a little known fact. Decker's continuous challenge is to choose between several engaging programs available to KPBS-FM. He also looks for programs that flow. For example, people tend to relax on Saturdays and shows like *Car Talk*, *Wait, Wait... Don't Tell Me*, and *Whad Ya Know* fit nicely with a more leisurely day. These shows flow well together because they all have the same feel.

It's Decker's job to understand why the audience listens, how they listen, when they listen, and to choose the programs accordingly. When looking at a new show to add to the schedule, he asks himself these questions.

- Is the show engaging?
- Is it better than anything already on the air?
- Given the current lineup, where would the show fit?

Radio programs on KPBS-FM are often geared to coincide with events happening in the community. For example, during the weeks around Gay Pride, shows with a local focus such as *These Days* and *The Lounge* will cover topics related to current happenings in the GLBT community. Last year during Pride Month KPBS-FM aired *Outright Radio*, a program produced by KUSP in Santa Cruz, which included five one-hour segments that dealt with GLBT issues. During events such as Pride, Decker looks for creative, engaging, and original programming that makes sense for the audience. “What we’re known for is finding stories that no one else is telling,” Decker said.

What Decker enjoys most about his work with KPBS is the environment at the station. He takes pride in the fact that KPBS is one of the most respected public radio/television stations in the country. In his own words, “KPBS is an example of how things can work when they’re working well.”