

# Pack 101, Item 1

Type: Broadcaster-how-to

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**How to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to interact with your listeners**: **Three methods**

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**Part 1: The missed call – interacting with radio listeners without software!**

The *missed call* is the most widely used feature of any phone in rural Africa. Mobile phone users use missed calls more often than regular phone calls, more often than sending or receiving an SMS, even more often than using the popular flashlight or torch feature of a basic mobile phone. Leaving a missed call – also known as a *flash* or a *beep* – is universally understood to mean, “I want to tell you something.”

Missed calls are especially useful when the person making the missed call doesn’t have airtime or credit to pay for a regular phone call. Instead, they call, let the phone ring once, then hang up. The recipient of the missed call sees that someone has called and can decide what to do. One option is for the recipient to simply call the person back. But, if the missed call has a meaning which was agreed on earlier – for example, “I will beep you when I am outside at your gate,” – the recipient knows the caller is outside.

For radio stations, the missed call is an excellent way to gather feedback and interact with listeners. It doesn’t require any special software or an Internet connection. It requires only a good old-fashioned mobile phone and a phone number that can be announced on the air. Just like two people can agree that a missed call means, “I am outside,” a program presenter and the program’s listeners can agree on the meaning of a missed call.

Here are a few ways that stations can use missed calls:

**To show agreement or to “like” something:** Many radio listeners in Mali “beep in” if they hear something on-air that they particularly like or agree with, including simply liking a song. Radio station staff can use the number of missed calls to determine which parts of a program are especially popular. This is similar to the famous “like” button on Facebook, except it is fairly anonymous.

**To cast a vote or “Beep-2-vote”:** If a presenter has two or more phones, he or she can conduct a small listener poll during a live program. The presenter starts by explaining the poll question and matching the possible responses with the different phone numbers.

For example, the broadcaster might announce that the poll question is: “What topic should we focus on for next week’s program?” The broadcaster might continue by saying, “If you want us to focus on small business ideas, leave a missed call on 0686 000 111. If you want us to focus on how to manage your kitchen gardens, leave a missed call on 0686 000 222.” The presenter would give listeners time to cast their votes, then count the number of votes for each option and announce the result when the poll closed. Ssebo FM in eastern Uganda included a beep-to-vote component in a project it ran on cassava. Over a period of eight months, the station received beep-to-vote calls from 3761 different individuals!

**To allow listeners to show that they want to be contacted:** If a presenter is working with a guest or sponsor who is offering a service, listeners can send their contact information via a missed call. This lets the service provider know they are interested.

For example, an agrodealer may have a new local business, and agree to sponsor a local station’s farmer program. The presenter invites people to: “Beep if you want to be added to the company’s list and learn more about their seeds and agric inputs.” The agrodealer will then have a contact list of people who want to be informed about products and services.

One advantage of missed calls is that they require only a phone, and no software. Even stations without a computer or Internet connection can use missed calls to increase their contact and interaction with listeners.

Although missed calls are an excellent, low-cost way to get audience feedback, radio stations can face challenges when using missed calls extensively. For example:

* Many phones can display only a limited number of missed calls (approximately 50 at most).
* There is no way to keep a record of previous beep and vote sessions because most phones can store only the most recent 50 missed calls.
* It is difficult to catch all missed calls. When many people try to beep at the same time, not all are counted because of busy signals (you cannot receive two beeps at the same time).
* It is difficult to prevent people from beeping more than once on a poll.

Thankfully, there are some new software solutions which build on the technique of missed calls, and can overcome many of these challenges. For more on this, read Part 3 below: “Using Telerivet to supercharge your missed call campaigns.”

For further information, feel free to contact bsullivan@farmradio.org. Thank you to Dominic Maweu and staff at Radio Mang’elete in Kenya for originally teaching me about the ways of using missed calls for voting.

**Part 2: How to get more women to participate in your programs: The women-only call-in line**

One of the strengths of call-in programs is that they allow broadcasters to hear from all sectors of their audience. Also, your listeners can hear the perspectives and experiences of young and old farmers, rich and poor farmers, and – especially important – men *and* women.

But women’s voices are often not heard as often as men’s voices on the radio!

The popular call-in segments on almost all African radio stations are dominated by a familiar group of callers. Sometimes it is literally the same people calling every time. This makes some wonder if these people have “special phones” that somehow magically cut through the queue and get to the on-air presenter!

More often than not, you hear men’s voices on call-ins. This article will share one method for getting more women’s voices on air.

**The women-only call-in line:** The idea is to provide two separate phone numbers – a number for women only and a second line for anyone who wants to call. When they have two call-in numbers, presenters can take as many female callers as they like simply by turning to the women’s call-in line and taking the calls. It is very unlikely that a man would want to be heard on the radio calling on a women’s line!

This is an excellent idea for any program where it is important to have an equal balance of men and women’s voices. FRI believes that this is important to almost *all* programs, and we encourage our partner radio stations to establish a women’s call-in line.

At Radio Mwambao in Tanga, Tanzania, the farmer program *Sauti ya Mkulima* used this technique to boost the number or women’s voices on-air during a radio campaign on cassava. Women then had the opportunity to discuss their creative marketing strategies on-air – and hear other women speak about the benefits and challenges of processing cassava. This helped the campaign reach more listeners.

It is easy to establish a similar system at your radio station. Find a phone and a phone number that can be dedicated in the on-air booth strictly as a call-in number for women.

It is best to dedicate this phone number exclusively for women during all programs. Avoid confusing listeners by using the women’s call-in number as a general call-in line on other programs. It could be embarrassing if the presenter says, “Hello sister – talk to me,” and a male voice comes through the speaker!

*For more information and to share your own ideas, please email* *bsullivan@farmradio.org*

*Special thanks to Liberian journalist Moses Browne for sharing this practice with us.*

**Part 3: Build a listener database with Telerivet**

It can be useful to maintain a database of listeners’ phone numbers, especially when a group of listeners express interest in being on a list of “regular listeners” to a specific radio program – for example, your farmers’ program. When listeners are on this list, the station can send them SMS messages, alerts that the program will start soon, and other communications.

This brief section explains the benefits of building a list of registered listeners and then explains some ways to interact with these listeners.

The cost of sending an SMS is dropping quickly. Almost every mobile operator in Africa offers bundles and encourages subscribers to spend a small amount of credit on a daily or weekly basis to send more SMS. This is great for radio stations who wish to interact and send SMS messages to a group of registered listeners.

Here are some of the benefits of using a listener database to help you interact with listeners:

* You can boost your audience by sending SMS reminders 30 minutes before a program begins.
* If you ask your listeners a question a few days before a program, you can receive comments and ideas which you can build into the week’s program.
* You can get to know your listeners by name and location, helping to build a special relationship and a stronger connection over time.
* You have a group of people who are willing to offer feedback about your program when you need it.

*Telerivet* is a free Android application which can installed on any Android smartphone. Telerivet can help you manage and track SMS and missed calls at your station.

**Requirements:** It is best to dedicate one Android smartphone for interactions with listeners. This phone should NOT also be used as a personal phone. The phone must be connected to the Internet either by mobile data (3G), or, preferably, through a WiFi connection at the station. To learn more and to see videos about how to set up and install Telerivet, visit [http://support.telerivet.com](http://support.telerivet.com/). When you are ready to register with Telerivet and get started, visit [www.telerivet.com/register](http://www.telerivet.com/register)

When you have connected your Android phone to Telerivet, you will be able to manage all your contacts on your computer through your web browser – just like you manage your email! You can use your Telerivet Android phone to add credit and subscribe to SMS bundles and offers just like you would on a normal phone. But you will use a web browser which is logged into your Telerivet account to actually send and receive SMS or missed calls.

When you begin interacting with your listeners and asking them questions, you can create a contact group to organize your listeners and make it easier to send them SMS as a group.

This is just the tip of the iceberg with Telerivet. For more help on using Telerivet at your radio station, contact support@telerivet.com or bsullivan@farmradio.org

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