

## Major Tom Meets Rocket Man: NASA Launches Third Rock Radio

Reports from various media segments lamenting the reluctance of this country's best, brightest—and youngest—citizens to embark upon a career in high-tech manufacturing continue to proliferate. They appear in print or broadcast outlets seemingly every day. And if there is one common thread running through these accounts—one which can also be readily found in past issues of this magazine—it is that manufacturing is not sufficiently “sexy” to attract the young and the restless.

Why is that? Aside from a very long history of literature, movies and television—and you may as well toss in music as well—depicting manufacturing work as something one accepts—not aspires to—could it also be that attempts to date in luring young folk to industry are themselves devoid of that four-letter word?

It may be a question without an answer, but look who is jumping into the fray with a decidedly different approach: Our National Aeronautics and Space Administration—yes, NASA—has launched (first and last space pun, I swear) a new, advertiser-supported radio station—Third Rock Radio ([www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov))—devoted to appealing to the “4G Generation” and its latent, insufficiently tapped science acumen.

As the press release announcing the station states, “Building bridges to connect with the hard-to-reach generation starts with knowing what they want.” And Houston-based RFC Media, NASA's partner in the venture, believes they have the answer. They have, the release continues, “successfully repackaged NASA's message around something the 4G audience already cares a lot about, their music! And, for the first time, America's best brands can ride along.”

Pat Fant is co-founder and CEO of RFC Media, a company that produces custom-designed, private-label radio stations for high-profile brands. Third Rock is his brainchild.

The station's advertiser (*no taxpayer dollars used*)—supported programming includes NASA highlights and features in science, technology and education that are presented in a casual, “street-smart tone,” all available via NASA iPhone and iPad mobile apps for anywhere/anytime access.

Significantly, Third Rock will help partner-companies fill high-tech job openings in the engineering, science and IT fields. In addition to the NASA Web Portal, the station will be available online under the radio tab of Apple's iTunes and other sites.

To lure sponsors, RFC has proposed a “customized,” comprehensive branding plan that would include on-air messages, on-site exposure (at live events) and special Third Rock programming features

“Third Rock, as a creative NASA outreach, is a direct pipeline to a highly qualified crowd in science, technology, engineering and math,” says Fant. “We are programmed for both the newly graduated job seeker as well as the pro with years of experience. The new rock/alternative speaks the language of both very well. The audience for the station is worldwide, so offering positions on any continent is fair game. We are looking for our first engineering firm that wants to invite young professionals to give them a look.”

And the reported 8.1 million monthly visitors to NASA's site should provide a wide and deep gene pool.

Fant hopes to leverage the radio venue to develop ways in which Third Rock can provide “direct access to students, young parents and tech-savvy young adults (taste makers and early adopters), along with some of the world's most influential scientists, researchers, innovators, astronauts, engineers and, without a doubt, music lovers.”

Indeed, the music is the hook for this enterprise—and its best chance for success.



Pat Fant (above right) helms NASA's Third Rock Radio.

“The music is the glue that holds it all together,” says Fant. “It gives the station street cred with the smart, skeptical and tech-savvy crowd. Plus, we talk to them, not advertise to them. We pull, not push. We are messaging experts in engaging, not selling.”

The station is heralded in the release as a “fresh entertainment environment tuned to awaken and inspire a worldwide audience by exploring new worlds of music.” To that end, “Music Explorers (hosts)” will present “discoveries in new music in a rock/alternative format that is known to index among the highest in education and income.”

“The delivery system for music and entertainment has permanently changed and it's never going back,” says Fant. “NASA's Third Rock is the first online radio station developed by professionals who have led many of the nation's most influential major market radio stations for over three decades. Now, NASA's Third Rock is taking new music discovery to a whole new height. Computers shouldn't pick records. People should.”