

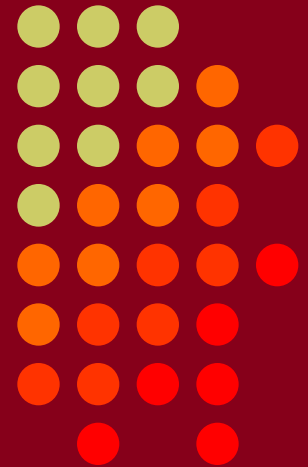
How to Get the Most Out of Your Contest Station

Contest success often depends on how well
you prepared your station for competition

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Necessary First Steps in Identifying Candidate Station Improvements



- Identify realistic time phased personal contest goals for selected contests, entry categories and competition region
 - first place winner, or
 - consistently placing in the top three, or
 - consistently placing in the top ten, or
 - successfully competing with your selected peers
- Identify the realistic constraints that limit your station improvements
 - desired time frame for achieving your contest goals
 - amount of your available time to implement station improvements
 - available physical space for more antennas and station equipment
 - annual funds available to support your station improvements
- Achieve a balance between your goals and constraints

Well Before the Contest Evaluate Your Station's Strengths and Weaknesses Compared to Your Peer Competitors



- Identify your station's strengths and weaknesses
 - including reliability -- relative to your peer competitors
 - transmitting and receiving antennas, feedlines and antenna switching
 - transceiver performance – focusing on receiver performance
 - amplifier output power and reliability
 - audio and CW keying quality
 - computers, software
 - your internal and external computer networks
 - all aspects of your station environment that limit operator performance
 - external and inter-station RFI problems
- Identify opportunities to improve your station's weaknesses and reliability relative to your peer competitors
 - in every category above
 - prioritize your total list of improvement opportunities

During and After Every Contest Prepare Notes Documenting Your Station's Strengths and Weaknesses Compared to Your Peer Competitors



- Identify every aspect of your station's performance that was strongly competitive compared to your peer competitors
- Identify every aspect your station's performance that was not competitive compared to your peer competitors
- Identify improvements that your peer competitors can't match
- Identify every opportunity for station improvement that could have improved your score in this contest, in priority order by:
 - estimated score improvement resulting from each improvement
 - degree of difficulty in achieving each improvement
 - practicality of achieving each improvement
 - impediments to achieving each improvement
 - expense to achieve each improvement

Improving the Competitive Performance of Coaxial Cables for Multi-tower Stations



- Coax longer than 300 feet is often used in multi-tower stations
- Andrew Heliax is an ideal choice for lengths up to:
 - 10 meters: 600 feet of LDF5-50A 7/8 inch Heliax, or 300 feet of LDF4-50A 1/2 inch Heliax
 - 15 meters: 700 feet of LDF5-50A 7/8 inch Heliax, or 350 feet of LDF4-50A 1/2 inch Heliax
 - 20 meters: 900 feet of LDF5-50A 7/8 inch Heliax, or 450 feet of LDF4-50A 1/2 inch Heliax
 - 40 meters: 1200 feet of LDF5-50A 7/8 inch Heliax, or 600 feet of LDF4-50A 1/2 inch Heliax
- Be cautious of the windload and weight (including ice load) of large Heliax cables mounted on light duty towers

Indoor Station Performance and Reliability Improvements



- Transceiver performance (sensitivity, dynamic range, filters)
- Amplifier output power and reliability
- Digital Wattmeters
- Physical environment that degrades operator performance
 - noise, chair, ventilation, desk height, equipment placement, line of sight
 - computer monitor height
- Keyers and paddles
- Microphones
- Computer keyboards
- Computer monitors
- Computers
- Antenna switching
- DX spotting network displays and alarms
- Propagation map displays from the Reverse Beacon Network
- Connector reliability, PL-259s tightly connected, SO-239 wear

Execute Your Proof of Performance Checklist Before Every Contest



- Prove that everything in your station is in working properly
 - well before the contest
 - improve and update your checklist regularly
 - record all performance measurements
- Never enter a competition with unproven equipment
- Prove that all indoor and outdoor equipment is working far enough in advance so you can make necessary repairs

Single Operator (non SO2R) Station Improvement Ideas



- Antenna improvements are almost always more effective and less expensive than any other station improvement and they improve both transmitting and receiving performance
- Receiving antennas make a big improvement on 160 and 80 meters
- Identify and mitigate RFI sources well before the contest
- Many modern transceivers have much improved receiver dynamic range and filter selectivity
 - know how to adjust your receiver for optimum dynamic range on every band
 - Develop a consistent habit of always checking your receiver's sensitivity every time you sit in front of it
- A wattmeter allows you to monitor transmitter and antenna performance during the contest

Single Tower Antenna Improvement Ideas



- 50-60 foot tower and a small rotator (e.g., HyGain Ham-IV)
 - small tribander, Hex-beam or quad
 - 40 and 80 meter dipoles and a 160 meter inverted-L
- 70-80 foot tower and a medium rotator (e.g. HyGain T2X)
 - Cushcraft XM-240 two element 40 meter Yagi
 - large tribander such as the SteppIR 4 element Yagi
 - 80 meter dipole and a 160 meter inverted-L
- 100-140 foot tower and a large rotator (e.g., M2 Orion)
 - Cushcraft XM-240 two element 40 meter Yagi
 - monoband Yagis such as the HyGain LJ series on ring rotators
 - 80 meter dipole and a 160 meter inverted-L

SO2R Station Improvement Ideas in Addition to Single Op Improvements



- Receiving bandpass filters are almost always necessary to protect transceivers from cross-band interference and physical damage
- Low power bandpass filters may be needed on transceiver outputs if your transceiver radiates broadband phase noise (many do)
- Stubs may be necessary on amplifier outputs if antennas are in close proximity
- Multiband antennas can cause excessive cross-band interference
- Most operators find it more effective to use multiple computers and keyboards
- Identify and resolve all cross-band interference
 - intermodulation caused by transmitted signals entering unprotected consumer electronic devices often re-radiate strong harmonics mixed with AC power or computer network signals creating broadband noise modulated sidebands on the transmitter harmonic