

# The Lazarus Effect

## How Independent Broadcasters Are Finding Signs of Life in National Revenue

With 2025 proving far more turbulent than expected, independent radio operators are eyeing 2026 forecasts with equal parts optimism and suspicion. One area many consider lost: national revenue.

**Greg Tacher**, EVP of Radio Reps at Gen Media Partners, disagrees.

*Radio Ink* sat down with Tacher to map out what independents (et al.) need to know about the national revenue horizon. Which battles are worth fighting? How does radio break down the door to political windfalls? And what investments are separating stations reaping national dollars from those left behind?

**Radio Ink: 2025 has been anything but predictable economically, but a few early forecasts are optimistic for the year ahead. How are you viewing 2026?**

**Tacher:** I think the main story in 2026 is going to be political spend. Inventories will become heightened as well. That messaging should get out to the



We need to be messaging that to those who may be on the fence about where to use radio in the mix or audio in the mix in the overall spend.

**Radio Ink: For political, the pot seems to only get bigger each cycle. What are you seeing early, and what adjustments should independents be making right now?**

**Tacher:** eTrack what they call “The Big Three” — that’s Senate, House, and governor.

Know where your state is in terms of lean: red, blue, or swing. Also track races

**Radio Ink: How can stations position against television, which always seems to get the lion’s share of these political buys despite not beating radio in ROI?**

**Tacher:** We need to fight that battle on every level. It can happen at the candidate, local, regional, and national levels using data. And there’s great data.

Nielsen still provides good overall audience measurement data. Edison Research has great information on the effectiveness of radio. Combine that story and bring it to the decision-makers. That’s how you elevate radio’s game.

**Radio Ink: Looking back at 2025, what’s a big no that you saw turned into a big yes this year?**

**Tacher:** One major national brand works through dealer groups. They weren’t spending on radio in their national plan. We coordinated between the national agency and our local station reps, who worked directly with the regional brand managers who were throwing money into co-op.

Those regional managers see what’s working on the ground. They messaged up the chain that radio was one of their most effective media — not to eliminate other channels, but to add radio back in. That advocacy from the field and the quality of the local folks’ messaging put radio back on the radar, and the dollars started flowing again.

**Radio Ink: Co-op is becoming an increasingly forgotten asset in the radio sales arsenal. How do stations turn one buy into an annual like that?**

**Tacher:** Start by empowering local retailers. When that happens and there is a spend, here’s the crucial part: after

“After the buy, you must prove its effectiveness. Show them the ROI. That’s how you keep co-op dollars flowing consistently.”

advertisers who still value and want to use radio. So getting ahead of the inventory game plays well. That still matters to the buying community; if there’s scarcity, there’s a reason for that.

There are advertisers, clients, and companies that still understand and respect and value what radio brings: a specific audience that has been curated over time to their clientele, whether that’s moving foot traffic, pointing somebody to a website, or a social media page.

that are open because the incumbents are retiring or leaving. Find out who’s controlling that spending. Is it one of the big national political agencies? Is it a regional shop? Is it a local candidate shop?

Finally, build direct relationships. We had a station group encourage a visit to a candidate’s headquarters. That turned into an on-air interview, word got back to the national agency, and radio became part of the buy. Connecting directly with both buyers and candidates can really pay off.

the buy, you must prove its effectiveness. Show them the ROI. That's how you keep co-op dollars flowing consistently. Too often, agencies don't request this data and stations don't pass it along to their national partners. You have to close that communication loop.

**Radio Ink: Another hot point – programmatic. That's a dirty word to a few folks. We see how the larger groups approach those sales, but what's the state of programmatic for smaller and independent operators right now?**

**Tacher:** Programmatic is coming to smaller and independent operators, so we're advising our stations to be prepared for it. That's often a technology play, and we actually have partners we can point them to who can help with that in a cost-effective way.

But here's the thing — inventory is the gold in the radio world, so you need to be strategic about monetizing it programmatically. The key is controlling how much inventory you open up to programmatic, because you could end up selling at very low rates.

Think about it: if a local or regional advertiser enters the programmatic game and it gets routed back to your station, that's not a wise way to sell that inventory. Local buyers know your audience, your shows, your personalities, and the real value of that. That inventory should be held close.

So it's really a control discussion. How do you continue to get the value for your inventory that you deserve while still making yourself available for dollars flowing programmatically in the audio category?

The other thing that should be done is to create additional programmatic inventory through podcasts of your shows and social media postings. That way you're not just throwing your on-air radio inventory into the programmatic mix. You're increasing your CPMs and offerings so you can take advantage of dollars you might not be able to capture if you just stayed pure radio.

## HOTTEST PROJECTED MIDTERM MARKETS FOR 2026

### Georgia

Senator Jon Ossoff's re-election could be the most expensive Senate race of 2026  
Competitive governor's race  
Atlanta, Savannah, and Augusta have huge potential  
Potential runoff could push spending into December

### Michigan

Open contests for both Senate and Governor = statewide saturation  
Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing  
House races in MI-07 and MI-10 will further flood markets

### North Carolina

Marquee Senate contest: former Governor Roy Cooper vs. former RNC Chair Michael Whatley  
High expectations for Raleigh and Greenville-New Bern

### House Race Impact

About 40 districts in play  
Mid-market radio stations could see unprecedented political dollars

Markets not usually on national radar will see heavy activity: Des Moines, Omaha, Portland ME, Scranton

Source: Assembly, 2026 Election Outlook Report

**Radio Ink: The FCC is now debating ownership cap changes, which could reshape the face of the business. Do independents gain any leverage through increased scarcity, or will it be lost when an 800-pound gorilla becomes a 1,600-pound gorilla?**

**Tacher:** Every transition offers an opportunity to relook at the offering that radio has. There will still be clients that prefer the shotgun approach — they want to buy large swaths of national audience bundled together at a discount. You get what you pay for in that world. You get tonnage. But will it be carried? When is it running? It's not a perfect marriage with audio.

Then there will be those who value even more highly the specific, valuable audience that individual stations bring.

This is where independents need to be really mindful. This is where sales becomes so important — having a marketing partner or someone who can describe what's going on and get that information

to the buying community. That kind of work is going to become more and more paramount as it gets easier to buy large swaths of discounted inventory.

**Radio Ink: If an independent operator makes only one big change to strengthen their credibility and really start locking in those buys in the next 12 months, what should that be?**

**Tacher:** Time. The independent broadcaster needs to invest time with their national sales representative to develop the appropriate information and data that agencies need. Concentrate on which accounts are important to target, and then invest the time in pitching and getting in front of those clients.

We've seen a lot of independents giving up. They're saying, "Ah, we're not getting much here and there, so forget about it." But the time investment is really critical. We've got independent broadcasters that are putting in the time, and they're reaping the benefits from it.