

Cooperative-Conscious Radio in Atlanta

BY AHZJAH SIMONS

I love co-ops, and I love radio! Naturally, upon coming to serve in one of the largest cooperatives in the Southeast six years ago, Sevananda Natural Foods Market, I was excited to use all the great media and technology we have available to us today. I wanted to uniquely represent Sevananda, its brand, and our family of management, staff, partners, distributors, member-owners, working members, and shoppers who all breathe life into this concept of cooperation.

I learned early that the best way to approach improving upon what already exists is slow and steady. To me that's the cooperative way in a nutshell. No quick-and-dirty, cookie-cutter approaches here.

After three years on the job, we began planning the implementation of Co-op Central, The Cooperative Living Radio Show, and Co-op 101 Radio Show.

Originally, Co-op Central was to be an online resource of everything co-op in our local area, as well as bringing the global cooperative movement closer to home. We wanted to showcase our cooperative and expand our presence in the community as well as connect with other cooperatives.

Many member-owners and people from the general community perceive that we are an island co-op because we are not a chain of Sevananda Natural Foods Markets. Although that's a beautiful vision, we feel like we *are* part of a chain—the cooperative chain or movement. We know that any time, we can reach out and connect, ask advice, test a program, or tap into resources provided by cooperatives and others that are in the business of supporting cooperatives—as if they were just another division of our office.

The ultimate experience of exposure to the cooperative smorgasbord was when I attended my first CCMA conference, which Sevananda hosted in Atlanta in 2005. It occurred to me then that a great way to begin to dispel the myths and mystique around cooperatives would be to use a few of the powerful means of communication we now have available to us, through the Internet. With email campaigns, online social networks, and other online technology, we're able to expand outreach and provide a wealth of knowledge for our members and the general community.



Sevananda Natural Foods Market empowers its member-owners, customers, and general community with online and terrestrial radio programs.

Technology allows us to market, educate, and track progress in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Simultaneously, we can connect with other cooperatives, educate on cooperative economics, and train on cooperative business structure and principles while addressing concerns for community. The technology also brings to light the vibrant, expansive cooperative movement of which we are a part. We used our Co-op 101 Member Orientation class as a base, one that could be tailored for a radio format.

Enter Co-op Central

Co-op Central Radio is an online radio program

that serves, educates and promotes to expand our mission: to empower the community to improve its health and well-being and to raise awareness about cooperative, sustainable, restorative, and healthy living. The purpose of Co-op Central is to provide a resource for the community and to showcase organizations that live and embody the cooperative model, its collective mission, and culture. As you well know, cooperatives share values, missions and visions. From banks to bicycle repair shops, cooperatives promote a business structure that creates a way of life that encourages and nurtures community, shared wealth, and integrity.

The Co-op Central Radio program exists to raise awareness of these organizations so they can connect locally, regionally, and globally to each other—thereby strengthening their collective impact, both on the communities they serve and worldwide. It also provides a wealth of resource information for our member-owners and the general community. Programming features health and wellness, green living, co-op education, products and services that Sevananda offers, class schedules, community partners, and more.

Since the establishment of Co-op Central Radio, we have also partnered with our local community station to produce a terrestrial radio show called Co-op 101. Because it is housed on public, non-commercial radio, it is a perfect fit for alternative programming with fresh, progressive ideas about life today. Co-op 101 focuses more on principles, education, and concern for community. We feature local, regional, and global cooperatives, as well as other organizations that use the cooperative model or collaborative practices within everyday operations.

Next on the show, we'll be beginning monthly documentaries about the incubation of specific startup co-ops. If you have any great ideas on topics for Co-op Central or Co-op 101, give us a call at 404/584-7875, ext. 1 for Ahzjah Netjer Simons. This has been a great way to bring the world another dimension of information flow dedicated to cooperatives. We'd love to have our regional and global cooperative family be a part of it!

The Cooperative Living at Co-op Central online show airs every first Wednesday of the month at ►

◀ www.sevananda.coop (click on the co-op central radio link on the home page). Shows are live and archived and can be found at sevananda.coop or sevananda.ning.com (an online social network).

Turn the radio on

There are many programs and options available for online radio. Live 365 (live365.com) is popular; others are listen2myradio.com, tvstartup.com, or blogtalkradio.com. We use blogtalkradio.com because it's good for live online shows. But their branding and logos are all over everything, so we created our own

logo and brand for Co-op Central.

All you need is a solid landline and a computer. Determine how frequently you'd like to broadcast: daily, weekly, monthly? Then research and schedule your guests. Create a web page to brand your show and draw traffic.

For music-only, you can create prerecorded MP3 files and load them for broadcast even when you're not there. You can create your own announcements or have a local studio do it for you. You can use Audio Acrobat (audioacrobat.com) to record shows and other audio files and load them up to a podcast

system or your website as needed for archiving. Audio Acrobat also has a guest line for leaving messages.

Again, there are lots of options. Just do some research, then get started. And of course, you can always call us if you have any questions.

Co-op 101 airs every Monday 4:30–5:00 p.m. EST on WRFG 89.3 FM. If you're in the Atlanta area, you can tune in to 89.3 FM. Listening online can be accessed at wrfg.org. Hear you there! ■

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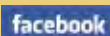
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