

# R&R ALTERNATIVE/ACTIVE/ROCK



The benefit of the bottom line is at stake

## Programming And Sales Working In Harmony

Mike Boyle

MBoyle@RadioandRecords.com

It's almost a cliché to say that the programming and sales departments at radio stations have butted heads for as long as anyone can remember. However, in light of continued revenue declines for the industry as a whole—local radio revenue dropped 4% in December 2007 compared to the same month a year ago, while national revenue fell a whopping 12%, according to the RAB—you have to believe that that old adversarial relationship would have to change.

After talking with a cross-section of broadcasters, there are indications that it has—and for the better.

Kelly Music Research GM Paul Kelly says getting sales and programming to work synergistical-

ly and in harmony at rock radio has always been a challenge. "Unfortunately," he says, "a station may be in a situation where they need to take any business they can get. When that's the mind-set and a sales person comes back to the station with a big

### A Media Buyer's View Of Rock Radio

Ever wonder what a media buyer thinks of the current state of radio, and in particular rock radio? We did too, so we put those two questions to JL Media Russo director of broadcast services Rich Russo.

#### What's your take on the current state of the radio business?

It's amazing that a medium that reaches 90+% of the population weekly continues to shoot itself in the foot, whether it's the HD radio disaster, the PPM drama, the lack of the RAB to truly champion the medium, some cookie cutter formats, etc., Yet radio remains effective for clients when they do use it. Clients return to radio again and again. The problem is getting the new ones. Can you imagine how much more successful the medium could be, if rather than these guys beating their chests over some insignificant things that they are doing, they focused on better programming and serving their audience rather than themselves?

Give us a media buyer's perspective on rock radio today.



Russo

This is the most frustrating thing of all: rock music over the last 50 years has either impacted cultural change or has been the soundtrack to it. Yet despite that importance, 99% of the programmers have lost sight of that and have made rock on radio pretty much not listenable. There's no vibe, no heart, no connection to the audience or even the effort to break a new band, and by that I don't

mean some new band a label is pushing, I mean finding a band in a dive bar somewhere. The PDs and MDs don't care; they care about focus groups and familiarity, not something that sounds great. It's a shame what's happened. I look at New York and what [CBS Radio alternative WXRK] 92.3 K-Rock is doing here and want to shoot a hole in my dashboard—there's nothing separating that station from a station in Little Rock. New York is the most important cultural city in the world and the radio doesn't reflect that whatsoever.

(WXRK PD Tracy Cloherty did not respond to R&R's offer to address Russo's comments.)

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—Paul Kelly



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—Brad Hardin

teddy bear promotion for his active rock radio station, it creates a challenge and it then falls on the PD, at the direction of the GM, to be creative and execute the promotion because the station needs the money."

However, it doesn't have to be a painful experience for the programmer, Kelly says. "Be creative, put a new coat of paint on that type of promotion and people will be into it. Don't be afraid to brainstorm and don't put a wall up between you and the sales department."

Regent Communications active rock WWBN (the Banana 101.5)/Flint, Mich., PD Brian Beddow thinks that programming and sales relationships are generally harmonious, but says they can also turn acrimonious at times.

"Program directors for the most part understand that the idea is to make as much money as you can, and sales managers understand that the idea is to get the best ratings you can. So, as you work together I think you can mostly get where each other is coming from."

#### Taking PDs On Sales Calls

Often, a PD showing interest in being a part of "closing the deal" or just educating clients about the station can make a difference in the bottom line.

Tampa-based Clear Channel Radio regional VP of programming Brad Hardin says, "I encourage my PDs to go on sales calls for our top 10 clients. That's something we started a couple of years ago. Once the PDs have done a few of these they are eager to do them again because they understand the value. I do them in many of the markets I oversee as well."

Kelly thinks it's a good practice, too, but for another reason.

"Several PDs I work with go out not to explain to the client about the station's programming or how a certain promotion will work, but to just sit and listen to what the client has to say about the radio station."

#### Responding To Advertising Trends

Larry Dankner, GM of University of Florida active rock WRUF/Gainesville, says it may be an anomaly to some, but his programming and sales department have proved that working together not only promotes harmony among the staff, but has helped improve station revenue.

"When I arrived here seven years ago," Danker says, "we were focusing on 18-34 and heavily skewed [toward] males. What we started seeing was a decline in ad sales. We had a couple of bad books—part of it was the music—and I started looking at trends in advertising and noticed that more buys were shifting into the 18-49 demo from the 25-54 demo. So I felt there was a hole in the market for the 18-49 demo and we adjusted musically and it paid off well."

Dankner reports that after the two departments worked together on the format adjustment, the station's gross annual sales grew from \$1.6 million into the \$1.85 million—\$2.1 million range, and "we didn't blow off our P1s either." **R&R**



Beddow



Dankner