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KOGO: Reclaiming San Diego's News/Talk Throne

Clear Channel Talker shining bright as the sun in 'America's Finest City'

Ask any AM radio junkie about legendary call letters that can be instantly identified with their city of license, and KOGO-AM/San Diego is bound to be on the list. For decades when you tuned down to the 600 frequency on your AM dial from most anywhere in Southern California — and a good part of the Southwest — your ears landed on the most listened-to radio station in America's Finest City.

But like those of most AMs in the '70s, KOGO's fortunes began to sink. By the mid-1980s those legendary call letters were dumped in favor of a cost-cutting simulcast with KKLQ-FM (Q106), then KOGO's much more successful and better-known

CHR sister station. The KOGO call letters quietly moved up the coast to a station in Ventura, a small seaside town about an hour west of Los Angeles, where they would remain in relative obscurity until 1993. That's when now-defunct PAR Broadcasting reclaimed them and brought them home to San Diego, the city where they were born.

In spite of the return of call letters that had so much brand name equity in San Diego, the relaunched KOGO struggled for the next few years under management that had little interest in making the necessary investment to return the station to its former glory. Even with a huge signal that stretches from Santa Barbara to Tijuana, Mexico, the once-mighty KOGO languished near the bottom of



Cliff Albert

the San Diego ratings pile. But all that would change in 1997, when KOGO was purchased as part of a massive acquisition deal in San Diego by what was then Jacor Communications.

Ushering In A New Era

Today Clear Channel's KOGO is back on track and has reclaimed its historic position as San Diego's No. 1 News/Talk radio station. For the past two years station management has followed a consistent and well-considered strategy to consolidate a combination of winning syndicated and local talk shows with a full-service newsroom to build a revitalized KOGO for the new millennium. With the station's recently signed deal to become the San Diego Padres' flagship station next season, one could argue quite convincingly that KOGO has become the crown jewel of Clear Channel's San Diego cluster.

Holding down the PD position at KOGO these days is 20-year San Diego market veteran **Cliff Albert**.



TWO OF SAN DIEGO'S BIG HITTERS

That's San Diego Padres President/CEO Larry Lucchino (l) along with KOGO afternoon talk host, Roger Hedgecock (r) as the pair saluted Padres' outfielder Tony Gwynn for his record-breaking 3,000th career hit during the '99 baseball season. KOGO is the Padres' flagship radio station.

Albert came to the position when the station was purchased by Jacor. At the time he was programming co-owned KSDO-AM, then the market's News/Talk leader. He was given added responsibilities for KOGO. Prior to that he'd spent 16 years as News Director/anchor for crosstown competitor KFMB-AM.

It's easy to see that Albert is a guy with some pretty extensive knowledge of the San Diego News/Talk marketplace. "When the company first took over KOGO, San Diego had a lot of Talk radio on the AM dial," he recalls. "In 1997 there were KOGO, KSDO, KFMB, KCEO-AM, KCBQ-AM — all doing some form of News and Talk — and XTRA-AM doing Sports/Talk. That's a lot of Talk radio for any city, let alone one of this size."

So how did the company come up with a strategy for KOGO in such a crowded field? "When in doubt, do research," says Albert. "That's what we did, and it pretty much confirmed that the market actually had too much Talk for the available listeners to the format. So we used Randy Michaels' well-known philosophy: Put the prime programs and biggest talents on the best signal, and you'll win. We moved all of the biggest and most successful syndicated and local

shows that were on KSDO at that time over to KOGO, then flipped KSDO to an all Business/Talk format.

"There was actually some consideration internally about trying to trade on the successful name and News/Talk image that KSDO had built over the years by moving those call letters down to AM 600. I'd have to say it was really Randy Michaels who prevailed in wanting to preserve those great heritage KOGO call letters, but doing so with a product that was updated and appropriate to what's needed to be a contemporary News/Talk winner today."

Teaching The Old Dog New Tricks

One of the moves made at the new KOGO was to take the traditional morning news block format and update it by adding a decidedly untraditional host. "We hired market veteran Jeff Prescott as host of our morning news show," says Albert. "Jeff was certainly not known as a traditional newsman around town."

For years Prescott was a major part of Rocker KGB-FM's morning show and also co-anchor of *The News Brothers*, a sarcastic daily newscast

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"The multistation cluster concept is unquestionably a tremendous advantage and, from my perspective, a big improvement over the old way of doing business in our industry."

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