

# Contemporary Hit Radio



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## CHR Rolls On, And On, And On

One of the hottest topics at the NAB/NRBA RCPC was CHR and its impact on music, the marketplace, and other formats. I was asked to moderate a great panel of programming experts: Q107/Washington's Alan Burns, KKHR/Los Angeles' Ed Scarborough, WHTT/Boston's Rick Peters, Rob Balon & Associates President Rob Balon, KPKE/Denver's Tim Fox, Cat Michaels of Z95 (WZUU)/Milwaukee, WKTI/Milwaukee's Dallas Cole, and John Lander from KKBQ-AM & FM/Houston.

### MTV Presence

One of the first issues discussed was the significance of MTV on CHR programming, and whether it should be looked upon as a threat or an ally. John said, "I don't view MTV as competition for us. I work with them as often as possible. Everyone knows about them and if anything, they help us stay on top of the trends."

Rob also spoke in a positive manner about the video service. "If anything, we've found MTV has helped to reinforce the positives of new records and artists. The only real negatives we see are the VJs themselves. Most people think they come off phony."

### CHR Saturation

The topic of three, four, and more CHRs in a market came to the surface. There was some concern that due to overcrowding within CHR, the large shares would be fragmented and the format pendulum might swing the other way again. However, a confident panel pointed out that FM helped in the supposed demise of CHR, as most of it was on AM; now, most of CHR is on FM. The



format basics which used to work are still valid today. Most likely, the panel concluded, those sound principles will keep CHR strong for years.

Gary noted, "We can look for the survivors in the format to be the ones who not only do it correctly, but who also are committed to the format and to winning." Most predicted that some of the latecomers to the format would fall by the wayside as the opportunities to find a unique niche within CHR dwindle.

## Hit Radio — The Hot Format Of 1984

This lively panel, moderated by ABC's Rick Sklar featured input from broadcasters with solid backgrounds in CHR: Z100/New York PD Scott Shannon, "Countdown America with John Leader" and "Hot Ones" producer/IS, INC. co-founder Jo Interrante, and WKXS-FM(KISS 108)/Boston PD/consultant Sunny Joe White.

Sklar began by telling the audience, "It is 30 years since Alan Freed spun the first rock 'n' roll record on the radio and Todd Storz invented a format based on playing 40 hit records. Hit music saved radio three decades ago, and in 1984, it is the comeback story of the year."

He said, "So much of the fun and spontaneity of radio left as programmers sought to specialize their formats in search of certain demographics. With most of the music listeners now on one band, FM, broadcasters are returning to mass market hit radio. To see it come back so fast, and leap right to the top in the biggest market is a great source of satisfaction. I've always believed that Top 40 was based on the most elementary principles of entertainment — pleasing most of the people most of the time. I still believe this format is the foundation — the very backbone — of all music radio."

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Pictured (l-r): Jo Interrante, Scott Shannon, Rick Sklar.

### AM Stereo

Touching on the survival of AM CHRs (a topic which will be covered in depth next week in this column), panelists spoke of the disappointing profile that AM stereo receiver manufacturers have taken in helping to spread the word about AM stereo. Most agreed that a lot more needs to be done if AM stereo is to make an impact. Ed dismissed the new technology, saying, "You can put AM stereo on the same shelf as FM quad." Rob sadly noted, "In our research, most people already think they have AM stereo."

### Personality Points

A popular trend in CHR today is to have a morning team. Is one necessary, and are all those voices possibly confusing for listen-

ers? "A morning team is a real necessity to win," reasoned Dallas. "They can offer so much more versatility and entertainment than one person can." John, who is part of KKQB's Q-Morning Zoo, pointed out that on his show there are a lot of voices and characters, but "each has its own distinct style and personality; each adds an important element to the overall mix."

It may be 1984, and CHR may be on fire as a format, but a member of the audience complained she was tired of hearing "women used in prime dayparts, as a rule, only as sidekicks to the main male talent." Ed, who doesn't have any females on the air, defended his position. "It's not by design," he said. "I look for the best possible person for the job. If it happens to be a woman the

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## Emotion Vs Science: Music Research

The battle continues: Is music programming a science, or emotion, or a combination of both? Moderated by Doubleday VP/Programming Dave Martin, consultants Jon Coleman and Bob Harper locked horns with RKO's VP/Programming Dave Roberts and Z100/New York PD Scott Shannon.

Jon stated, "When I first heard the title of this session, I had to say, quite frankly, that there isn't a choice. We've all heard the arguments about research and its role in selecting music, and I'm tired of them. In 1984, we should be seeking ways of gaining new knowledge and information, not arguing over the past. We need to know how listeners respond to music."

"The only music that should be played is what the audience likes and wants to hear. And the only way to do that is to gather information on the listener's attitudes and opinions about their music. To guess about what they like is an obsolete idea. The problems inherent in emotional programming are far more dangerous than those in possible problems with researched programming."

"Emotion and science are necessary," countered Roberts. "We call it gut, and it's a very important part of programming. I don't believe you can put all of your faith in the numbers. They must be tempered with your gut. GMS stifle PDs, saying, 'I paid for this research, so we're going to use it.' On the other hand, PDs who say, 'Research is no good' are a dysfunction. Your emotion is based on your experience and knowledge of the music, the artist, and the marketplace."

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Pictured (l-r): Bob Harper, Dave Martin, Dave Roberts, Scott Shannon, Jon Coleman.

### CONTRIBUTING YOUR THOUGHTS

## The NAB/NRBA RCPC: A Step In The Right Direction

Start with 5000+ eager broadcasters, add a few hundred hungry equipment/service/programming/syndication vendors and their staffs, sprinkle in some record promoters, and fold it all into downtown Los Angeles. Preheat this mix to 100+ degrees, spread the meetings out between two different hotels, stir well, and you've got the recipe for the combined NAB/NRBA "RCPC."

As could be expected at the first joint meeting between the two powerful radio associations, the results were at times a bit confusing and frustrating for attendees. Many broadcasters remarked that there was a certain sameness to the premise and subject matter of several meetings. Others commented that the panels could have been strengthened if the moderators had been involved in the panelist selection process.

### More Street-Level Input

One NAB official privately admitted, "We really had a lot of ground to cover for this meeting, and unfortunately, a lot of it was planned from our 'ivory tower.'" This pretty well summed up a generally-held feeling that next year's RCPC should draw more

from the knowledge and strength of those attending. The best way to tap into what people are thinking about is to involve a number of them in the planning process.

Putting a convention together of this magnitude is a monumental task, to say the least. The NAB and NRBA are to be applauded for melding their resources for the overall benefit of radio. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that their intentions were the best. With that in mind, please offer your viewpoints, suggestions, and help for next year's joint RCPC to both organizations. Then make sure to attend the October '85 conference in Dallas. I'm certain the improvements will make it even more worthwhile than this year's convention.