

Slow-Breaking Hits By New Acts: More Durable Than Stars' Singles?

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Boesen's call-out research scores for "Who Needs Pictures" show the difference a few more weeks and additional spins can make. He started testing the song when it was in medium rotation in May, and it had an unfamiliarity score of 14%. By Aug. 1, the unfamiliarity score was down to 1%. In the same time period, the "dislike" scores for the song dipped from 5% to 2%, and the "like a lot" scores went from 26% to 39%.

Of course, given a choice between an unfamiliar artist and a superstar, most programmers would pick the superstar. "I wind up asking myself [which one] is going to turn the radio station on its ear," says Boesen. "Well, absolutely everyone is excited about the [superstar], so we jam it in there and play the wheels off it because we can get response right now. But in the long run, are we burning out these big songs way too fast?"

THE HEAT OF THE ACT

Monument Records VP of promotion Larry Pareigis agrees that fast-moving hits may find themselves at a disadvantage in future auditorium music research. "Those are the records that end up not testing as well because they're not as familiar," he says. "They end up testing out [of the library], and you find an act that was a superstar becomes, due to the process, less and less relevant."

"A record running up the chart is indicative of the heat of the act, but it has nothing to do with the long-term health and longevity, necessarily, of that particular title in a gold library," Pareigis continues. "It works the exact opposite. There are definitely signs at radio that a lot of the larger, mainstream acts are suffering from this."

Still, Pareigis is not exactly inclined to ask PDs to play a hit Dixie Chicks single less just to slow it down on the chart. "I'm never going to be the guy saying, 'Play that record less.' No, play it more, but play it for a long time when it's a legitimate hit," he says. "The fact that 'Ready To Run' was at No. 10 after just nine weeks is absolutely thrilling to me. I'm thrilled that country radio has embraced the act and made them that relevant and important to the format. I want it to spend plenty of time in the top 10. I want it to reach where it's going to reach and then spend plenty of time on its way back down, because that's what's going to sell records."

"The more weeks a record stays inside the top 10, coming up and coming down, is the kind of mass tonnage that is required to generate the impressions which generate the familiarity which drives the interest of buyers who buy the product," says Pareigis. "So of

course a record that takes a long time to get there and a long time to come down, to me, is a preferred thing . . . as long as it's selling records. [But] the dilemma for a record label is, you can find yourself getting locked into a 26-week [single] that doesn't sell records. Then you've committed half of your year to a single that's selling 2,000 units. That's tough, but you can't walk away from a single, because then you look to radio like you're not committed to the act. So it's a real conundrum.

"Everybody in town knows that you really start to sell a lot of meaningful product once the song gets moved into a power recurrent category, which is usually a non-pre-emptible position at radio stations," says Pareigis. "There is a phenomenon where listeners who hear a record all the time are not as inclined to buy it. Once a record gets moved into power recurrent and they hear it less, they tend to want to go buy it."

Records that did spend a lot of time in the top 10 and in that power recurrent category, Pareigis says, are significantly more likely not only to move product but to test well in stations' music research. "Wide Open Spaces" sold a ton of albums," he says. "Lonestar's 'Amazed' is selling a ton of albums. Kenny Chesney's 'How Forever Feels' was a big record for Chesney. All of these are viable, important records that hopefully were played enough and had enough of a longevity that they'll end up testing great on the other side and become a permanent part of gold libraries."

SOMETHING LIKE THAT

One way to ensure enough spins, even on a fast-moving superstar release, is to "take a little more predicated time between releases," says Pareigis. But ironically, sometimes the very radio programmers who plead for that kind of time between singles sometimes don't allow it to happen.

Curb Records recently experienced just such a situation. When McGraw's "Please Remember Me" peaked and moved into recurrent airplay at most stations, the label fully intended to wait six to eight weeks before coming out with another single and was deliberately tight-lipped about what that single would be. But numerous radio stations began playing "Something Like That."

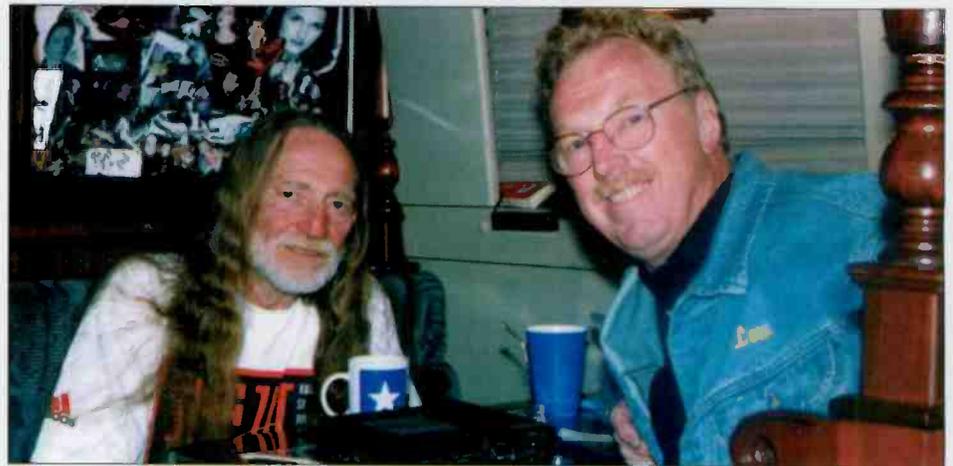
Carson James, Curb's VP of promotion and media strategy, says, "With it being summer, and ['Something Like That'] being the kicking, uptempo tune from the album, it seemed everyone picked the same album cut to play. Once the consultants hit it, we had no choice" but to work it as a single. "Radio had spoken."

'Berry' Nice To Meet You



John Berry visits with staffers of WKKT (Cat Country) Charlotte, N.C., during a radio tour to pre-promote his first Lyric Street album, "Wildest Dreams." Pictured, from left, are WKKT promotion director Mike Brooks, PD Bill Young, Berry, and night jock Dave Michaels.

Two Guys Shmoozing On The Air



Jones Radio Network Classic Hit Country Network OM Lew Jones, right, prepares to interview Willie Nelson aboard Nelson's tour bus following a recent concert at Red Rocks Amphitheater near Denver. The interview was carried on Classic Hit Country's 90 affiliates.

Station Swaps To Herald Y2K?

Expect a lot of station-swapping in the closing months of the millennium, says First Union analyst **Bishop Cheen**. "You're going to see a lot of portfolio-shaping. A lot of stations will also rationalize their markets and adjust to some of the changes to the rules regarding cross-ownership." In August, the FCC relaxed its regulations that govern common ownership of both radio and TV stations. "The top line is strong, the fundamental economics just keep getting better and better, while the margins are expanding to the tippy-tippy top." Even so, Cheen won't say whether a consolidated Wall Street radio world has topped out. "If it is the peak, I will tell you it is one of the longest peaks in history, but I'm not clairvoyant enough to tell you it is the peak."



While the Federal Reserve worries about inflation, recession, and interest rates, which were hiked another quarter percent Aug. 24, Cheen is not convinced it will dampen radio's parade. "You have to have a magnitude of change in the cost and access of capital to impact the values of radio; it's still a relatively low interest-rate environment."

Wall Street is watching closely how radio integrates the Internet into its operations, says Cheen. "If you're looking for a trend, let's look for operators trying to set up their own Broadcast.com." Several radio groups, including Emmis and Citadel, are banding together for an Internet division that will not only stream audio but tap other Web resources. Cheen applauds the initiative. "Whenever new media comes along, it is always better when there's choice because one breeds off the other; you always like something to compare it with as an investor."

CAPITAL: CBS PURSUING VIACOM

Viacom, owner of MTV and VH1, is reportedly being pursued by CBS, according to published reports. Analysts believe CBS is especially interested in Viacom's Paramount unit, which owns 19 TV stations. Last month's FCC decision allowing one company to own two TV stations in one market would give CBS a second station in Philadelphia, Boston, Dallas, Detroit, and Miami. CBS and Viacom officials are not commenting.

Dallas-based production firm TM Century has become a company-in-waiting, as it weighs several proposals to merge or be bought out. The offers were uninvited, says president/CEO

David Graupner. "We are nonetheless open to discussing these opportunities."

CAPITOL: MORE LPFM FLAK

Two members of the House Telecommunications Subcommittee are urging the FCC to rethink its low-power FM (LPFM) proposal. In a letter to FCC Chair **Bill Kennard**, Reps. **Cliff Stearns**, R-Fla., and **Michael Oxley**, R-Ohio, ask Kennard to report back to Congress the FCC's analysis of whether microradio is technically feasible before it begins licensing the service.

During the National Assn. of Broadcasters' Latin American Conference Aug. 26 in Miami, pirate radio was a hot topic, as unlicensed stations are more commonplace in Central America. NAB president/CEO **Eddie Fritts** said the FCC's LPFM proposal is being looked on by many around the world as an attempt to legalize pirate-radio operators. Fritts said that may encourage even more pirates to sign on.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit has upheld the February 1998 conviction in Tampa, Fla., of pirate-radio operator **Arthur Kobres**. From Nov. 1995 to Sept. 1997, he continued to rebroadcast shortwave broadcasts on 96.7 MHz. Following his conviction, Kobres was sentenced to serve 36 months' probation, six months of in-home detention, and pay a \$7,500 fine.

The FCC has flagged Clear Channel's purchase of top 40 **WBTJ** Youngstown, Ohio, and Citadel's purchase of oldies **KOOJ** Baton Rouge, La., citing concentration concerns.

The FCC has upheld a \$2,000 fine against **AC WZNL/WFNL** Green Bay, Wis., for violating the FCC rule requiring stations to charge political candidates the lowest unit rate.

As part of its presidential study of the marketing practices of the entertainment industry, the Federal Trade Commission is seeking public comment on its subpoena of recording, motion-picture, and video industries, as well as its plan to conduct focus groups of children and to survey parents to gather specific information on their perceptions of music-labeling and movie-rating systems. The information solicited will be used by the FTC and the Justice Department to produce the study, requested by President Clinton in June, on whether the entertainment industry markets violence to children.

NEW MEDIA

CD Radio has filed paperwork with the Securities and Exchange Commission to sell up to \$500 million in stock, with proceeds earmarked for capital expenditures and paying down debt.

SALES

Bathysphere Broadcasting is buying country **KSNI** and **N/T KSMA** Santa Maria, Calif., from Bayliss Broadcasting for \$3.75 million. Bayliss was founded by **John Bayliss**, the namesake of the annual Bayliss Roast charity dinner that raises money for broadcast scholarships.