



JOEL DENVER

CONTEMPORARY HIT RADIO

B96 ADDS VARIETY AND BLOWS 'EM AWAY

A Lesson In Radio Facelifts

After five years at CBS-owned B96 (WBBM-FM)/Chicago, PD Buddy Scott watched his station's dominant position slip away (3.7-3.3-3.2-3.3). Just when the situation was becoming grim, the fall '86 Arbitron showed a 4.2 upswing.

The fall outcome may finally squelch B96 format-change rumors that flew around town during the last several months. The reasoning then was, "Why not?" After all, WHTT/Boston and KKHR/Los Angeles both dumped CHR in favor of more adult-oriented presentations. Today, neither of those facilities is doing as well as B96. WHTT became Gold-based WMRQ and posted a 0.9; KKHR became soft rock KNX-FM, earning a flat 1.4.

Airstaff Revamped

Attributing the aforementioned decline to a fragmenting marketplace, Scott said, "The ACs got more uptempo in their approach, and the AORs became more mainstream. This splintered the CHR cume. Each book showed continued deterioration, but we still managed to maintain one of the market's highest cumes behind WGN and the other full-service facilities."

Realizing that "our presentation needed a facelift," Scott began making air personality changes last summer. When the dust settled,

"These moves give us a more relaxed and personable sound. We're no longer the wham-bam music box of Chicago."

ed, only Joe Bohannon remained from the original airstaff. Scott said, "We scored Ed Volkman, whose dad is a local TV weather personality, for mornings. We hired former WBMX overnigher Carla Box to do middays, grabbed Paul Donovan from KAFM/Dallas for afternoons, and moved MD/afternoon personality Joe Bohannon to early evenings. We raided WBMX again for Geno Jones to follow Joe and acquired Charlie Ryan from WFYR for overnights.

"These moves were designed to give us a more relaxed and personable sound, without sacrificing our music content. We're no longer the wham-bam music box of Chicago. Depending on the records, we can play 14 or 15 songs in some hours."

A good working relationship between Scott, VP/GM Wayne Jef-



Buddy Scott

erson, and the sales department kept B96's commercial limit at eight minutes. This allowed B96 to get maximum dollar for each unit sold despite falling books and gave Scott the room to keep the music rolling.

"Even through this difficult period, research told us B96 was still the preferred CHR," Scott explained. "We knew we were a strong station with an equally known identity. It became a matter of reversing the cume slide and getting the audience to listen longer."

Junk Those Jingles

Phase two of the facelift included dropping all jingles. Voice sweepers took their place, giving B96 a set of on-air production values different from every other station's. Imaging statements such as "Chicago's Fresh New Music Mix," "B96 Now With More Variety Than Ever Before," and "Chicago's Station Of The 80s" reinforced the outlet's position.

The final step: modifying the music to support the on-air marketing. "Harder-edged rockers were dayparted, whereas before they were played in mornings and middays," said Scott. "We added some recent gold in places and included more Urban crossovers than any CHR or AC had ever done in this market."

The addition of more Urban crossovers was an interesting strategy, given the fact that even in the '60s and '70s, crosstown WLS was more apt to play an AOR crossover than an Urban crossover. "B96 had fallen into that same trap for years," Scott said. "Our focus

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groups indicated Urban crossovers weren't as popular, but we decided to take a shot. We reasoned the lack of exposure in the past contributed to the poor showing for Urban product among CHR listeners."

Describing B96's music balance and the difference between his station and B/U outlets WBMX and WGCI, Scott said, "I'd say we're about 50-50 in our ethnic to non-ethnic mix. However, unlike Urban Contemporary stations, we still play the CHR hits.

"Journey, Chicago, Huey Lewis, Genesis, Survivor, and other artists of that genre are still very much a part of our playlist. B96 is just a bit more aware of the Urban hits, made familiar by WGCI and WBMX, which will cross over."

Immediate Audience Response

Next up on the agenda was extending the rotations slightly, integrating recycling techniques, and prepromoting music and events.



B96 MD/Night rocker Joe Bohannon, Columbia artist Eddie Money, and mid-day personality Carla Box smile for the camera at a Sound Warehouse store.

Then B96 was in gear. "What we did isn't necessarily right for everyone," cautioned Scott. "These moves were made in order to redefine and create a unique position in the market.

"Response was immediate. The phones began to ring for requests, and the sales department was feeling it on the streets. All of the unscientific but gut level research methods reinforced our actions. And our Arbitrends, which had dipped to a 2.9, have been rising ever since the changes kicked in."

The bottom line result was a healthy book. B96 posted a third in 18-34 women and number one in non-ethnic 18-34 women. Add in males and the station is #6 among 18-34 adults, and #4 non-ethnic in the same cell. And, yes, B96 is still a proud #1 in teens.

"CBS is very happy with what's happened," said Scott. "We took an unhealthy situation and reversed it by assessing the market's needs and realizing we could fill those needs without a wholesale format upheaval. I'm particularly proud of the gains in morning drive. Ed Volkman and the team beat Q101 (WKQX), which has longtime female favorite Murphy In The Morning."

No Outdoor, No TV

And would you believe B96 did not advertise on outdoor or TV? "Historically, we've not been

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\$50,000⁰⁰

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SONG SHEET FOR NOVEMBER 24TH-28TH

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24TH
6-7 AM "California Gurls" By David Lee Roth
7-8 AM "Say You Say Me" By Lionel Richie

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25TH
6-7 AM "Caribbean Queen" By Billy Ocean
7-8 AM "No One Is To Blame" By Howard Jones

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26TH
6-7 AM "West End Girls" By The Shop Boys
7-8 AM "I'm On Fire" By The Pretenders

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27TH
6-7 AM "Gloria" By Luis Braganca
7-8 AM "Nasty" By Janet Jackson

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28TH
6-7 AM "We Built This City" By Starship
7-8 AM "Like A Virgin" By Madonna

OFFICIAL RULES

CBS, Paper Clips, General Business, Household Appliances, and other prizes are available in participating markets only. In the Chicago area, prizes shown will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. The number of prizes available is limited. Prizes are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. All prizes are subject to availability. All prizes are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. All prizes are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.



PICK UP A NEW SONG SHEET EACH WEEK AND BE SURE TO LISTEN TO ED VOLKMAN 5:30-10 AM ON B96!

heavy spenders in those arenas," said Scott. "We usually do one TV campaign a year, but we did do a pretty strong contest this fall.

"Using 7-11 and Arby's as distribution points, we did a twist on the \$1000 song of the day idea. Each week we handed out the 'B96 Song Sheet,' which gave the songs, when to listen, and call. This not only increased our cume, but the music changes and the contest helped our TSL."

Scott is still a big believer in the strength of albums and concert/movie tickets as prizes. "They still make the phones ring, and the demographic appeal of these prizes has widened considerably. More

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adults than ever go out to concerts, and the teens are still just as happy to win tickets and albums. Going to a concert or making a trip to the record store aren't cheap expenditures."

Using the "press-the-flesh" method of promotion, Scott sends his personalities out on numerous appearances each week. "Mingling with and having fun with your listeners can't help but carry over into the ratings."

So what does Buddy think about the future and the recent changes at rival Z95 (WYFZ)? "It looks pretty good from here. Ric Lippincott has got Z95 sounding better than before, but he's simply traded positions with us. He's slow on adding Urban crossovers, and we're slower with the rock stuff. If nothing else, it will show there are two distinct ways to grab CHR listeners in Chicago."