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Rock 40 Vs. AOR: The Story So Far

You've undoubtedly been inundated with theories and opinions about the so-called Rock 40 format. However, facts, especially those concerning Rock 40's success in the ratings game, are more difficult to come by. With that in mind, I returned to our precious cache of Arbitron books to ascertain what's *really* going on with this current-intensive, hard-rockin' format.

I concentrated on stations using the narrow, "pure" Rock 40 approach most musically similar to AOR: Roxette, Fine Young Cannibals, and similar crossover artists are fine, but you won't hear any Paula Abdul, New Kids On The Block, Janet Jackson, Milli Vanilli, etc. These Rock 40s, unlike current-intensive AORs such as WAZU/Dayton, primarily use a traditional high-intensity CHR approach with formats to match. (There are, of course, exceptions, with WMMS/Cleveland the most notable.) Since I used the summer book to compile statistics, only stations in continuously-rated markets were included in the survey.

Survey Results

The results — detailed in the Rock 40 Scoreboard — are mixed. Five stations recorded 12+ increases, while the other five were off from the previous survey. WZZU/Raleigh experienced the most significant gain, more than doubling its spring showing. WMMS, the nation's *heritage* Rock 40, suffered the biggest loss; the station posted its worst book in several years.

Among the five most well-known Rock 40s — KXXR/Kansas City, KEGL (The Eagle)/Dallas, KQLZ (Pirate Radio)/Los Angeles, WDFX/Detroit, and MMS — only Pirate registered 12+ growth. And of the ten Rock 40s examined, only Pirate managed to finish number one in a scoreboard demo. It's taken Scott Shannon and company just two books to claim the top spot in 18-34s.

Rock 40 proponents have gone on record saying the format is not necessarily limited to 12-24, and the ratings confirm that. For example, 50% of the Eagle's audience is 25+. WROQ/Charlotte, WXGT (92X)/Columbus, and Pirate exceed 40%. The majority of the MMS audience (61%) is 25+ — hardly surprising considering the station's long and unique history.

However, none of the other Rock 40s was able to draw a significant share of the coveted big generation. The highly-touted KXXR and WDFX depend on 12-24 for three-quarters of their listeners. And teens make up a large portion of those 12-24s, particularly at DFX, where 39% of the station's overall audience is 12-17.

You can look at these figures two ways. If success means doing well in your target audience, and Rock 40's target is 12-24, just about every one of the Rock 40s is successful. Seven of the ten were number two in that demo; none placed worse than fourth. And since most have been using the Rock 40 approach for a limited time, continued growth is certainly possible.

However, if your idea of success is contingent on 25+ achievements, you probably won't be switching to Rock 40 anytime soon.

Effect On AOR

Which brings us to the most important questions: how are AORs faring against their Rock 40 foes? Do the format's ratings accomplishments merit the fear I hear in so many AOR programmers' voices?

Check the scoreboard and you'll find most AORs — even those squeezed by Rock 40 on one side and Classic Rock on the other — are, to quote that ubiquitous commercial, "succeeding, not just surviving."

Remember when all you heard about was how KXXR was demolishing KYYS? It just ain't so. KY's back on top 12+ and has a far better demographic profile than its

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Rock 40 Summer Scoreboard

Here's a look at how Rock 40s did against AORs and Classic Rockers in the summer Arbitron:

Station	12+	Persons 12-24	Persons 18-34	Persons 25-54	%Teens	%25+
WROQ/Charlotte (Rock 40)	4.9-5.6	3	4	10	21%	44%
WRFX/Charlotte (AOR)	7.2-7.5	4	2	3	3%	73%
WMMS/Cleveland (Rock 40)	10.7-7.6	4	2	3(T)	11%	61%
WNCX/Cleveland (CR)	7.3-7.6	3	1	3(T)	8%	60%
WXGT/Columbus (Rock 40)	5.4-7.6	2	4(T)	6	30%	41%
WLWQ/Columbus (AOR)	9.6-7.3	4	2	3	1%	72%
WMMG/Columbus (CR)	5.2-5.1	5	4(T)	7	4%	62%
KEGL/Dallas (Rock 40)	4.4-4.0	4	5	13	19%	50%
KTXQ/Dallas (AOR)	3.6-3.8	5	1(T)	10	3%	59%
KZEW/Dallas (AOR)	2.2-1.6	11	12	20	2%	64%
KZPS/Dallas (CR)	2.7-2.9	15	8	9	2%	85%
WDFX/Detroit (Rock 40)	4.5-4.4	2	6	19	39%	26%
WCSX/Detroit (CR)	3.9-3.6	8	2	7	3%	75%
WLLZ/Detroit (AOR)	4.1-3.3	4	4	16	14%	46%
WRIF/Detroit (AOR)	3.8-3.2	6	3	10	5%	64%
KRZR/Fresno (Rock 40)	5.1-4.8	2	3(T)	16	20%	22%
KCLQ/Fresno (CR)	2.2-2.4	15	10	7	0%	92%
KKDJ/Fresno (AOR)	5.5-5.5	4	1	3	6%	61%
KXXR/Kansas City (Rock 40)	6.7-5.1	2	4	15	25%	26%
KCFX/Kansas City (CR)	4.3-4.6	7	6	5	4%	77%
KYYS/Kansas City (AOR)	4.7-5.3	6	2	4	4%	74%
KQLZ/Los Angeles (Rock 40)	4.3-5.5	2	1	8	20%	43%
KLSX/Los Angeles (CR)	1.8-2.0	14	12	13	5%	82%
KLOS/Los Angeles (AOR)	3.8-4.1	6	5	3	3%	70%
KNAC/Los Angeles (AOR)	1.0-1.0	9	16	33	25%	27%
WLRS/Louisville (Rock 40)	5.5-6.3	2	5	9	29%	28%
WQMF/Louisville (AOR)	8.3-8.2	4	2	4	8%	66%
WZZU/Raleigh (Rock 40)	3.0-6.5	2	2	12	9%	27%
WRDU/Raleigh (AOR)	10.1-8.7	4	1	1(T)	7%	62%

All figures refer to Arbitron metro survey areas, Monday-Sunday, 6am-midnight. (T) signifies a tie for the position. %Teens refers to the percentage of a station's quarter-hours from listeners 12-17; %25+ refers to the percentage of a station's quarter-hours from listeners 25+.

Where Does Rock 40 Belong?

The debate over what a Rock 40 actually is and to what charts such stations should report rages on.

To some observers these stations should unquestionably be part of the CHR universe. They primarily play singles, are current-intensive, rotate songs very quickly, and typically employ traditional CHR formats, including screaming intros and jingles. (There are, of course, exceptions.)

Musically, however, Rock 40s have as much or more in common with AORs than CHRs. Unlike mainstream CHR, Rock 40s don't always follow a strict timing regimen with regard to weekly adds. They jump on songs faster and occasionally play depth tracks. *Pirate Radio* for example,

was three tracks deep on the *Rolling Stones*.) And most Rock 40s play library cuts a mainstream CHR would *never* touch.

To find out how much Rock 40 has in common with AOR and CHR, AOR Assistant Editor Lynn McDonnell and I compared Rock 40 playlists with that week's charts, including New & Active and Significant Action. (We used the same ten stations featured in the Rock 40 Scoreboard.)

Identical Averages

Thirty-one percent of the mythical "average" Rock 40 playlist con-

sisted of songs not found on the corresponding CHR chart. When we compared Rock 40 to AOR, the deviation was *almost identical* (30%).

It's important to note the importance *timing* played in these results. Remember, we compared station playlists to tracks that made the R&R charts that particular week, *not* songs that may have charted at one time but had dropped off. Rock 40s, like traditional CHRs, tend to add songs later and hang on to them longer than AORs. Most of the deviation from AOR was a result of the different timing.

Take *WDFX/Detroit*, for example. Over 50% of DFX's list could

not be found that week on the AOR charts — the biggest deviation in the survey. But most of those songs had already charted bigtime on AOR and had fallen off, like "Free Fallin'," "Heaven," "It's Not Enough," and "Dr. Feelgood." In reality, only 16% of DFX's list was strictly non-AOR material.

As for *KXXR/Kansas City*: the station reported 53 songs that week, and *every one* had achieved a minimum of AOR New & Active status at some time or another. But 22 of the 53 songs were nowhere to be found on the CHR pages.

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