



TONY NOVIA

## PD DAN GARITE FIGHTS OFF L.A. STATIONS WITH A LOCAL CAMPAIGN

# KCAQ Reclaims Its Home Turf

Discovering bright, new, up-and-coming talent is always enlightening — and the good news is, there is plenty of it out there in CHR land. Recently, I spent some time interviewing one of the most impressive new programmers I've met this year, **Dan Garite** (pronounced *gareetay*). Garite is the very well-spoken 23-year-old PD for **KCAQ (Q-104.7)/Oxnard-Ventura**, which services a Latino-influenced community located between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles on the California coast.

Garite began his radio career in junior high. His older brother had a radio show on the high school station in Turlock, California, a town close to Modesto, and Garite would sneak in to watch and help out. By the time he was a freshman in high school, the instructor let Garite run

a bully at school used to pick on him all the time. One day, Garite got fed up with it and hit the bully so hard, the kid skidded across the floor on his back. Garite was never bothered again after that, not by anybody. He explains, "So, if you stand up for yourself, you can

was lacking because everyone seemed to be on their own page. It was my goal to get everyone associated with this station and get people really into and focused on this CHR/Rhythmic format."

While Garite has worked many formats in his career, CHR/Rhythmic music is by far his passion. "I grew up with this music and break dancing. When I finally got to this format a year ago, I was so happy, because I love this music. I grew up listening to KMEL." To get the station to where he wanted it to be, he took some of the best of what Power did, the best of what KKBT (The Beat)/L.A. did, and then used some of the music that he felt the two of them, for whatever reason, were overlooking. "The songs may have been a little more pop, but they were still hits. Like Robyn's 'Do You Know,' which neither station was playing. It worked out really well. In fact, the slogan that I'm using on the air right now is, 'Q104.7: The station that has all the flavor.' We've established the music image that we have all the flavor of R&B, hip-hop, old school and dance.

"We also have good specialty shows that cover each kind of music to an extreme. But, during regular hours, I will never play two rap songs back-to-back or two ballads back-to-back. We are R&B-based,

**I will never play two rap songs back-to-back or two ballads back-to-back. We are R&B-based, but you will hear hip-hop, R&B, and dance.**

the station and gave him his own show. By his sophomore year, he was working at the college station at Stanislaus State University, where he had an underground hip-hop show. In his junior year, KMIX/Modesto hired him to do weekends.

When Citadel blew into Modesto about a year later with a new Country station, KATM (Kat Kountry 103), they sought Garite out for overnights, and he helped the still top-rated station launch. Garite says that was the best radio experience of his life, because he was there from Day One. It was at KATM that he learned the valuable lesson of how to dominate. Since then, he's put what he learned to good use at formats ranging from Classic Rock to Country, with stops at KHOP/Modesto, the former KSOL/S.F., KNAX/Fresno, Westwood One, and KOCP/Oxnard-Ventura. A little over a year ago, he became PD of CHR/Rhythmic KCAQ.

### Creating The Game Plan

As PD of KCAQ, Garite found himself competing with powerhouses like KPWR (Power 106) and about 80 other L.A. signals booming in simultaneously. He quickly realized what he and all of the staffers at KCAQ had to do: win in their own metro (where they had been losing badly, especially to similarly formatted KPWR).

For encouragement, Garite remembered that when he was a kid,

change perception. In the case of this station, I'm standing up for this entire area, which never really had been done before." Garite points out that KCAQ had not captured the essence of what was going on right in its own backyard. "No one had their finger on the pulse of the local listeners. They were not progressive enough. Living in Ventura, in the shadow of these huge Los Angeles stations that set the trends, I realized that we had to be progressive, and here that means aggressive. When I arrived, the station was very conservative. We needed to develop some attitude, program the right new music, and make a stance to operate at the same or a higher level than the other stations.

"This area was not supporting the station, and it definitely showed in the ratings, because Power 106 had better 12+ ratings when I got here a little over a year ago."

### Programming Music Flavor

The goal was to refocus the station to represent the area and ensure that KCAQ was playing the hottest music. Garite remembers, "At the time, KCAQ was playing ballads that were not hits and a lot of Euro-type dance music, which just doesn't work on the West Coast. The first thing I worked on was getting the right music on the air, and then came the personalities. At the time, the staff was not into the music, and a real team effort

but you will hear hip-hop, R&B, and dance. We work hard on the flow. Because of that, we do not play white, pop-sounding records like Spice Girls."

### Local, Local, Local

After living in the region for about a year, Garite understood that the huge Latino population needed to be served in order to properly represent the audience. "It was my opinion that we needed at least half of the on-air lineup to be Latino or Latina. Right away, I put on two Latino kids at night, 'The Rico & Mambo Show.' They are locals, and they brought a totally new flavor to the station with a lot of Spanglish. On the air, they totally represent this area, and they are very relatable. It worked, because



**A CASUAL AFFAIR** — KCAQ/Oxnard PD Dan Garite (c) and afternoon co-host J. Scratch (r) get up close and personal with the ladies of Shades on their recent visit to the station.

our former nighttimer had a 6 share, and they went to 16.8.

"I also moved morning co-host Juanita into middays, where she also captured the essence of the station. In afternoons, it's the 'Café Con Leche' show, featuring J. Scratch, who is Mexican, and Schoolboy, who is African American. So, one is the *leche* [milk], and one the *café* [coffee]." Garite and a mixer continue to hold down mornings.

When it comes to personalities, one thing Garite quickly discovered was the key to being local and being relatable. "It's not a DJ talking about the new Ferrari he just bought and separating himself from the listener. One of the things that happened to some L.A. morning shows was that at first they were very relatable, then, as they got big, they kind of separated themselves from the audience and turned into stars."

### Creativity Without Cash

We hear so much about stations that have budgets versus those that don't. Garite believes that it's not all about money when you're competing against larger or better-resourced stations. "It's a matter of being creative, and you do not need a big budget to be creative — although it is easier. If you have creative ideas, you can pull them off without a huge budget. We did that recently with a Keith Sweat show. I simply got with the promoter and put us in a position where we were the sponsoring station. Sure, being creative takes more time and longer hours at the office, but every day we build a car out of a bag of parts. It is harder, and we know that other stations have five mechanics, all the parts, and the frame, but we can still build the same car by being creative."

Speaking of creativity, Garite struck gold after listening to an interview with Olympic boxer Fernando Vargas, who was born and raised

in Oxnard. Garite noticed that during the interview Vargas kept mentioning the 805, saying that he would never forget it, because that's where he's from. He was referring to the area code, and it turned out that "805" was an underground slang term for the region. Garite thought it was cool, and that KCAQ should try to capitalize on it. Former morning driver Hal "9000" Abrams incorporated it into the name of the morning program, which ended up being the "Live In The 805" show. It caught on so quickly that the listeners were making unsolicited comments on the air about how good it was to hear the music in the 805. "When we came out with the 805," says Garite, "we were covering everybody with one phrase, and it worked wonders. So, we incorporated it into the station logo, which is, 'Representing for the 805, Q104.7,' and, 'Finally, a station in the 805 that knows what's up.' It was a moniker that could separate us from Los Angeles and start the little turf war image that we created."

### Words of Wisdom

After turning KCAQ around and getting to program the music that he loves, Garite leaves us with these mature words of wisdom: "Don't ever take all of the credit yourself. I know that I could never have done this without an awesome staff, without an owner who was willing to give me a chance, and without a GM who was willing to have this format on the air. As much as I can ramble on about my ideas, you have to have a team that's very focused, hungry, and willing to go along with you and stay true to the format. There is not one person working here who would rather be listening to alternative rock. Everyone is on the same page. My advice is, be creative and go about it with a positive mindset and never think that it's impossible. People thought I was nuts, but we did it."

**One of the things that happened to some L.A. morning shows was that at first they were very relatable, then, as they got big, they kind of separated themselves from the audience and turned into stars.**