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The 411 On Callout

It's not just for Hot AC and Pop/Alternative anymore

Mainstream and Soft ACs have relied heavily on auditorium tests as their music research tool of choice. Quite a few such outlets, however, have joined many of their Hot AC and Pop/Alternative counterparts in incorporating callout into their music research mix.



Jodie Renk

Jim Ryan

This week we speak to an executive at a leading callout research company and an OM/DPD who has seen the light when it comes to callout to get their thoughts on this type of research.

If asked for their ideal target, many ACs would specify a 37-year-old suburban working mother. That description happens to apply to **Jodie Renk**, VP/GM of the nearly seven-year-old Core Call Out Research. But to remain objective, the former KROQ/Los Angeles Dir./Advertising & Promotion keeps her personal music preferences to herself.

Newly boosted WLTW/New York OM/DPD **Jim Ryan** is also a callout proponent and relies heavily on callout research at his Chancellor Media Lite AC.

R&R: Jodie, please describe the fundamentals of callout research.

Renk: You identify the audience, contact them, and find out what they think about the music. How you contact them — in terms of qualifying and using them — is what differentiates research companies. It's important to know what a company does with the data, how they present it, how much service they provide with it, and how many levels of analysis they do.

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—Jim Ryan

R&R: What are the different services companies like yours provide?

Renk: Nothing is constant. We spend a lot of time developing custom client reports and making sure that clients have a chance to see the factors they value most. Each client sees something a little different in his report.

When we have a group that has multiple stations in the same format, we can create a group ranker that they can use as an overview. This allows them to see what else is going on around the country.

R&R: How are ACs and Hot ACs using callout?

Renk: As Pop/Alternatives deal with faster and faster rotations, they're increasing callout from every other week to every week. We're also seeing that some ACs and Hot ACs that didn't do callout in the past are now doing it once a month, every three weeks, or every two weeks.

Ryan: One of the most important things when you're seeking at-work listening is knowing about burn. It's important to know when to slow down the rotation on a record you've been playing for a while.

Most ACs do three or four auditorium tests a year and have no way of knowing if one of their songs burns out between tests. You also have to know what is — and isn't — a hit. Quite honestly, I look more to records that have been in big movies or that have come over from other formats. It takes a long time to make a song familiar if we're the only one playing it.

R&R: How does AC callout compare to how other formats, like CHR, use callout?

Renk: The only significant difference I see between an AC and a CHR is that the AC is very aware of the level of familiarity and carefully measures what percentage of the audience knows a song. Obviously, the key for an AC is that, when people tune in, they have a comfort level with the station. It's not an AC's mission

to break new music. They pay much more attention to the level of familiarity a song has.

Familiarity is less of an issue at CHRs, Pop/Alternatives, and some Hot ACs. They're more concerned with a song's potential. How hot is it out of the box? Is it a record they can break? Is it a new record they want to get on early? They don't emphasize the level of familiarity.

Ryan: We use callout on WLTW pretty much the way I did when I was a CHR programmer. While "high rotation" for us is about 40 fewer plays a week than it is for the average CHR, callout helps determine when to play a record in heavy rotation.

We can also see when we can play something in morning drive. Every song in that daypart should be a home run. You don't want someone's clock radio going off to something that's unfamiliar.

R&R: Are today's ACs more likely to allocate money for callout than they were two years ago?

Renk: I think so. More ACs are doing callout, and stations are doing more callout than they did the previous year, which indicates that callout is moving

up on the priority scale.

Ryan: My advice to any station playing currents is that they absolutely must do callout in some form. It's crazy for an AC not to have a test score for their most-rotated current. With ratings and advertising revenues as important as they are, there's too much money at stake *not* to do it.

R&R: What about market size?

Renk: Up until the last few years, and particularly through the early '90s, the price of callout from premium providers made the cost prohibitive for just about anyone in markets 51+.

Some stations in markets 60, 70, and 80 that might not have budgeted for callout in the past are now looking into it and feel that it's a tool they must have. Most of our clients have come from the top 50 in the past, but now we're seeing more clients coming out of markets 51+. They might not be able to have it every week, but it's something they feel they must see.

Ryan: I learned a very impor-

More Wheeling & Dealing

Stations were flying all over the place last year! Last week, we noted the transaction highlights for January through June of 1998. Here's a recap of the AC, Hot AC, and Pop/Alts that changed hands in the second half of the year.

7/10: Sinclair sells Soft AC WFOG/Norfolk to Petracom Media.

7/31: Capstar Broadcasting acquires 32 Triathlon Broadcasting stations in six markets, including Pop/Alternative KTNP/Omaha, KRBB/Wichita, KISC/Spokane, Hot AC KVUU/Colorado Springs, and Pop/Alternative KKNE/Lincoln, NE.

8/7: Pioneer Broadcasting sells Hot AC KMXS/Anchorage, AK, to Morris Communications.

8/21: Chancellor Media purchases Soft AC WDOK/Cleveland from independent Group LP and Hot AC WQAL/Cleveland from M.L. Media Partners.

9/4: Chancellor Media acquires Capstar Broadcasting for \$4.1 billion. ACs changing hands include (in order of market size): WLTQ/Milwaukee; Hot AC WSNE/Providence; WLYT/Charlotte; WMAG/Greensboro; WRSN/Raleigh; WIVY/Jacksonville; WMJJ/Birmingham; Hot AC WMXB/Richmond; WMYI/Greenville, SC; KSSK AM & FM & Pop/Alternative KUCD-FM/Honolulu; KJOI/Fresno; WLHT-FM & WQFN-FM/Grand Rapids; Pop/Alternative KTNP/Omaha; KRVE/Baton Rouge; KISC/Spokane; KRBB/Wichita; Hot AC KVUU/Colorado Springs; WLRQ/Melbourne; WSRW/Worcester, MA; Pop/Alternative WXHT/Portsmouth, NH; WMLI/Madison, WI; Pop/Alternative KOSQ/Modesto, CA; WMEZ/Pensacola, FL; KMXR/Corpus Christi, TX; Hot AC KMYI/Beaumont, TX; KRNO/Reno, NV; WMJY/Biloxi, MS; KTYL/Tyler, TX; WAEV-FM & WYKZ-FM/Savannah, GA; KEZA/Fayetteville, AR; KYMG/Anchorage, AK; Pop/Alternative KKNE/Lincoln, NE; KNSY/Amarillo, TX; KKST/Alexandria, LA; WEZF/Burlington, VT; and WBXX/Battle Creek, MI.

9/18: Jacor picks up Hot AC KEZY/Anaheim, CA, from M.L. Media Partners and Hot AC KYYY/Bismarck, ND, from Meyer Broadcasting.

9/18: Hot AC WHLM/Wilkes Barre transfers from Magee Industrial to Radio Friendz.

10/9: Sterling Communications sells Hot AC WSGL/Ft. Myers to Fenda Broadcasting.

10/16: Clear Channel puts up \$4.4 billion in a tax-free, stock-for-stock deal with Jacor.

10/16: Hot AC WIOG-FM & WGER-FM/Saginaw, MI, are sold from 62nd Street Broadcasting to Citadel Communications.

10/16: Progressive United sells KVKI/Shreveport, LA, to Jacor.

10/23: Onyx Broadcasting deals KTRR/Fort Collins, CO, to NCR III LLC.

11/20: Wolfe Communications purchases WZDQ/Jackson, TN, from Quality Broadcasting Of Tennessee.

11/27: Wicks Broadcast Group sells WSUY/Charleston, SC, to Citadel Communications.

12/4: Jacor acquires WKST-AM & FM/Youngstown from Great Scott Broadcasting.

tant lesson in the early '80s when I was programming rock-leaning CHR WJXQ/Lansing, MI. We were No. 1 until CHR WVIC came in and did callout. They handed me my head, because their music was better-researched. If you're in a smaller market, you look at how often you do callout and try to be safer in what you play.

In fact, we didn't have research money when I was at WDRQ/Detroit in 1978, so I set up a Junior Achievement company, and the JA club did the station's callout for free. We sold the research to the concert promoter, and the Junior Achievement company fulfilled its purpose and made money. You can always find a way to get the research you want done.

R&R: Jodie, did any callout scores surprise you this past year?

Renk: I leave my emotions out of it; sometimes I'm too inside on one hand and too old on the other. Certainly one significant trend has been

AC's divergence. In listeners' minds, there is a difference between a Pop/Alternative and an AC sound. The gulf has narrowed a bit, but that has to do with AC walking away from its previous quieter, softer, sappier sound.

The other thing I found remarkable in 1998 was the level of country influence. Faith Hill, LeAnn Rimes, and Shania Twain all did well in AC's top 100-testing callout songs. That's something we hadn't seen in past years. It speaks well for the power of ballads.

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—Jodie Renk