



The no-repeat work week goes country

This Idea Bears Repeating

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In assembling a profile of Bonneville's WYGY (the Wolf)/Cincinnati, we lie awake at night, wondering if the station's MD, Kathy O'Connor, did the same—pondering how in the world she would find enough music for any given week. ■ It's been almost a month since the Wolf rebranded itself, adding "Open Range Country" to its moniker, along with nearly 1,000 songs to the library. The extra music is necessary, you see, because not only did the Wolf make a commitment to imaging variety, it instituted a no-repeat 9-5 work week. In case that seems incredulous for country radio, allow us to repeat: No song plays twice between 9 a.m. Monday morning and 5 p.m. Friday afternoon.

The idea of "no repeat" has been a staple of AC radio for years, but no country stations that we know of have ever tried it. And let's face it: If someone in country had given it a whirl successfully, others would have followed suit by now.

Nope, WYGY is first, which comes as a surprise to Bonneville/Cincinnati OM Patti Marshall. "Nobody's done it in country, but once you break that seal of, 'We're going to play all this music,' how do we demonstrate to listeners in a very real way that we really do play variety?"

Marshall says the idea came from O'Connor, who threw the "no-repeat workday" grenade in the room during a strategic conference call with consultant Jaye Albright, WYGY's research vendor and Marshall.

Recent History

It's helpful to back up and track the recent history of WYGY and Marshall. In slightly more than a year, the station has endured four owners: CBS Radio, Cumulus, Entercom and now Bonneville. Entercom flipped WYGY country and gave it a new frequency (97.3) in November 2006. The WYGY calls have flown over a country station before in Cincinnati; in the early '90s it was actually one of the first "Young Country" stations in America, calling itself "Y96." In fact, it was during those salad days of country that Marshall did afternoons at and programmed Y96, after origi-

nally coming to the market for nights on country sister WUBE (B105) in 1991.

When CBS Radio bought B105, Marshall segued into marketing, but returned to programming four years ago as PD of hot AC WKRQ (Q102). She was elevated to OM in the wake of WUBE/WYGY PD Marty Thompson's June departure, but her focus is primarily Q102. Two weeks ago, Marshall announced that Travis Moon, longtime APD/MD at Clear Channel's KEEY (K102)/Minneapolis, would join the two country outlets Aug. 27 as PD.

In Arbitron's spring 2007 survey, WUBE posted a 6.9 persons 12+ and ranks second in the market. WYGY trails with a 0.9. Clearly, WUBE is the mother ship for country in Cincinnati. Marshall describes the Wolf's role in the Bonneville cluster, saying it's similar to the days of Young Country going up against B105: "It's a flanker, but we also want the station to have some success of its own. Playing this music gives it a completely different music position than B105 and a different demographic appeal." While WUBE is a mainstream country station, the music mix that defines the term "Open Range Country" for the Wolf focuses on the years 1989-1994, with the fringe areas coming before and after.

"I would say that's the center of the radio station, but we just played the Statler Brothers the other day," Marshall says. "Just hearing 'Islands in the Stream'—I mean, what's wrong with that song?"

Indeed, music imaging touts the Wolf as playing everything from George Jones to Trace Adkins. That's not to say the Wolf doesn't play current music, although rotations will move slower because of the no-repeat work week. Spins for currents are being added to drive times and the station features more standard rotations for heavy currents on weekends to service P1s.

Females To Males

Marshall says B105 is targeted to deliver a 60-40 ratio of females to males, whereas the Wolf's music mix is designed for older males. Albright is responsible for the category and library architecture, and says the result should be a 50-50 mix of men and women. "It's going to be all about TSL, rather than cume. In the short run they want to build up loyalty and create some buzz, and hopefully cume will come," Albright says.

Marshall says the Wolf is now built around creating a point of differentiation between the two stations that is diverse demographically, musically and imaging-wise. "Now the Wolf is a unique country radio station vs. being the second country station."

Marshall says it was never meant to be a B105 clone. "You have to separate stations in more ways than just imaging, and boy, there's some great country music that a station like B105 would love to play, but there just aren't enough hours in the day."

It's still early in the branding process for the Wolf, since the format flip was made as recently as November, and adding an extra positioning layer like "Open Range Country" will also take time. So far listener response has been overwhelmingly positive, especially for the no-repeat work week, Marshall says. "This approach has been done by hot AC and AC stations mostly to encourage in-office listening. You don't get the listening fatigue that a hit-bound station can produce, but I don't know a lot that have stayed with it forever."

Marshall insists that research would get in the way. "I don't see how you could do an auditorium test," she says. "That's what's so great about what we're doing now. Can you imagine going into your library and saying, 'What a great song, let's play it!' Does that sound like radio 20 years ago?"

Not only have listeners embraced the wider music mix, but Marshall says her airstaff is onboard big time as well. "They have a unique position now. They're no longer in B105's shadow; the goals complement each other. You become your own thing and you focus the staff on what they bring to the party that's different than B105."

Might other country PDs experiment with a novel idea like a wider playlist featuring more than 1,000 songs and a no-repeat work week? Marshall says it is likely a struggle for PDs to try something like this because it doesn't test. She also believes that while radio might still own the element of surprise, it largely fails to use it.

"If you want to talk about why radio doesn't get the shares it used to, it's not the iPod's fault—it's our fault. The iPod has a finite capability. Guess who had the 'shuffle' first? Radio did. We are the originator of the shuffle. Radio still owns the surprise, so use the power." RJR

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Patti Marshall

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