

Hot 97 Questions Negative Publicity

Written by Robert ID1014

Thursday, 17 March 2005 02:42 -

Rap artist Jadakiss last week had a personal message for his hip-hop rival 50 Cent: "You should just sell clothes and sneakers "cause out of your whole camp your flow's the weakest." He chose not to relay the message by fax or two-way pager, nor did he pick up the phone. Instead, Jadakiss turned to an outlet that has become an increasingly popular avenue for communication and conflict within the world of hip-hop: the radio station Hot 97.

He could not have chosen a bigger megaphone. Hot 97, which is owned by the Indianapolis-based Emmis Communications Corp., is the No. 2 station among listeners in New York City and has been No. 1 in the city's 18-34 demographic for nearly a decade. It earns an estimated \$40 million annually in revenue, putting it in the top five of Emmis' 25 radio stations. But in recent months the station has been buried in bad publicity. Critics contend that Hot 97 (WQHT-FM) has tilted from credible arbiter of rap trends to ratings-hungry promoter of violence and racism.

Two weeks ago, gunfire erupted in front of Hot 97's Greenwich Village offices, shortly after 50 Cent announced on the air that he was booting his protege, the Game, from his G-Unit clique. The incident, coincidentally, occurred on the first day of the rapper Lil' Kim's perjury trial, stemming from her account of a 2001 shoot-out in front of Hot 97. All of this follows the monthlong battering Hot 97 has endured for airing a song mocking victims of the tsunami tragedy.

Out of control?

The effect has pointed up, at the very least, how commerce on the cutting edge of hip-hop culture can go awry. And the recent events may impose another real-world price on the station: The landlord of the building that houses Hot 97 has threatened to oust the station, citing a track record of shootings, fights and "severe verbal abuse of security and building management personnel."

Emmis executives say they are simply trying to maintain their balance.

"We don't want to do anything that provokes or encourages or escalates any kind of violent

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behavior between camps," said Rick Cummings, president of Emmis' radio division. "By the same token, I can't have the radio station being viewed as a sellout or less than genuine by the younger part of the audience."

Meanwhile, local activists are calling for an overhaul of the station. Rosa Clemente, a leading organizer of an anti-Hot 97 rally held earlier this month, accused the station of promoting music filled with misogynistic and violent content. "They call themselves the place where hip-hop lives," she said, "but hip-hop does not live there. A culture of greed and disrespect lives at Hot 97."

The Rev. Al Sharpton and several state and local lawmakers recently asked the Federal Communications Commission to turn its attention to the station. And along with every other major radio broadcaster in the area, Emmis has received a subpoena from Eliot Spitzer, New York's attorney general, for information on its promotional practices.

"We have run into a string of rotten luck here," Cummings said in an interview, "but if you look at us over the last 17 years, I think the record is pretty stellar."

Jadakiss says he believes that the media at large are partially responsible for perpetuating violence in hip-hop. "I could see if they tried to downplay the beef in their interviews or they were looking for ways to end it, but they keep it going," he said. "And when the guns come out, they're the first ones to start crying about violence in hip-hop. It's crazy."

No "beef records"

Emmis executives say that they specifically discourage DJs from fanning flames of discord during interviews. Barry Mayo, who manages Hot 97 and two other Emmis stations in New York, said his DJs have been coached about how to ask the juicy questions listeners want answers to. "But they are trained to ask them in a fashion that is responsible, which means you don't egg them on."

Cummings added that the station chose not to air Eminem's "Hail Mary 2003," which

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eviscerates the rapper Ja Rule (Kay Slay, a popular Hot 97 DJ, featured the song on one of his mixtapes). "We opt not to play most "beef" records," he said. "Occasionally, it may be out of concern but more often than not, it's because they're just not very good."

Rappers themselves seem less conflicted about the value of publicly airing grievances in interviews or beef records.

"If I strategize this right, this could be the biggest thing that happened to me," said Jadakiss, one of a handful of rappers disparaged in "Piggy Bank," a recent beef record by 50 Cent. "This could help my current album start selling again and help my future album sell." DJ Kay Slay, whose predilection for battle songs have earned him the moniker the Drama King, said such records are hits with the Hot 97 audience.

"You have no idea how many thousands of calls I've gotten from people who want to hear "Piggy Bank,"" he said with a sigh. "What are we supposed to do, especially if the station down the dial is playing it?"

[Source](#)

* Editor's comment – "What are we suppose to do"? Well Hot 97 try making a statement and not playing it. TRY standing out for the "right" reason. Sometimes it isn't all about the 'chedda', it is about what is 'real'.-Robert