

Have We Had Enough of Hip-Hop Radio

Written by Davey D ID2719
Monday, 12 June 2006 23:16 -

Have We Had Enough of Hip Hop Radio? by Davey D

If you check the latest ratings you may find it interesting to note the fall of some prominent Hip Hop stations in Los Angeles and New York. For the first time in a long time WBLS is actually doing better than both Hot 97 and Power 105. In Los Angeles none of the urban stations (KPWR-Power 106), KKBT 100.3 the Beat and KDAY are in the top 10. The fall of Power 106 which is sister station to Hot 97 is major when you consider the fact for years this was the dominant station in LA.

This huge drop in ratings leads to one asking what's really going on here. Is the public growing tired of the same Laffy Taffy, homogenous G-Unit format that can be heard on every Hip Hop station from city to city and from coast to coast?

Are the audiences of these stations getting older and simply want something a lot smoother and more adult oriented than the crunk style offerings that dominate these stations? Does the fall of these stations indicate better things to come? Will the program directors of these outlets finally get it and start giving the people what they want versus what the labels say they need?

I ran into Greg Street of V103 in Atlanta the other day and asked him about this and he pointed out something interesting. He noted that many of the deejays on those stations that are falling aren't true on air personalities. Yes, many of them may have name recognition. Some of them are artists and TV stars, but he pointed out that very few have actually been apprentices to radio. He said this comes into play at the end of the day, because people really want more than celebrity.

He added that there's a science, methodology and commitment one has to have when it comes to doing radio. He pointed out how many have been tossed on the air and have not been given any rhyme or reason as to how they should be doing things. He said that people are growing tired of hearing cats come on the air and not really talk about nothing and not do anything.

He also pointed out that very few go out and do things in the community for the sake of making a difference, as opposed to doing a promotional gimmick for the station or themselves. Street

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pointed to the high ratings and success of V103 in Atlanta as proof of his point. Will you ever see a personality like Funkmaster Flex going into the schools trying to mentor kids who need it or will it become a big event complete with TV crews and lights designed to highlight him and the station versus the kids who really need help?

Street talked about all the behind the scenes community work he and others at his station do that is not promoted on the air. He says it's done because he is really a part of the community and the lives of his listeners. At the end of the day it's that sort of commitment that will win out in the end.

Journalist Mark Skillz noted this in an article he penned a few months back called 'shout Out Radio" where he pointed out how today's on air personalities do nothing more than give shout outs on the air. They shout out friends, celebrities and album release dates for particular artists and walk away thinking that's enough, when in fact the community and listeners need and want so much more.

He noted that people get turned off when they turn on the radio and have to endure some deejay bragging about how he was backstage hanging out with an artist drinking Cristal when most couldn't even afford a ticket to the event. He said that these jocks have increasingly become out of touch with the listeners and have ceased being effective conduits for the community that craves information that is meaningful.

With the demise of some of these big urban giants we have to also look at the big drop in album sales for many big named artists despite increased promotion and hype. 50 Cent going from 8 million albums sold on his first release to 4 million albums sold on the Massacre album is a good case in point.

While record label execs are quick to spin this and note that 50 sold the most albums last year, they are slow to point out that he had 5 times the promotion put behind him. In 2005 he had several expensive marketing campaigns including ones to promote his movie, energy drink, video game and book. He was always on MTV and BET and could be heard in regular rotation on Top 40 stations thus indicating that he had crossed over to the mainstream. Like I said all that promotion didn't come cheap. It was brought and paid for, yet instead of increased album sales you saw less.

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Blaming it on downloads and bootleg CDs doesn't explain the big drop off. There's no way 4 million albums were downloaded. And if that was the case explain the drop in ratings with many of these urban Hip Hop stations where his music is played day in and day out. Is it too much? Are we being oversaturated with the same old same old? Are these stations missing the mark?

KKBT the Beat in LA recently switched up their format and said they wanted to play abandon rap and play R&B while fusing it with adult oriented talk. They wanted to go back to the tradition of urban radio where your favorite jock hit you upside the head with good music and good conversation. That seems to fly in the face of the 'More Music Less Talk' mantra that is embraced by most commercial radio. Is this what's needed or is there something else missing?

Some say that the music needs to match the mindset of the people. It's too dumbed down and juvenile. The other night at the House of Blues, the Roots performed to a sold out crowd that ranged the entire age and ethnic gauntlet. You saw gangsta types and Bohemian types all up in the venue grooving along to the band and their special guest which included Blackstar w/ Mos Def and Talib and GZA from Wu-Tang.

Tickets were being scalped outside for 100 bucks a pop. A local deejay that will go unnamed asked out loud how come her/his radio station never plays The Roots when it's obvious that they have such a big fan base and this is what a lot people want? Why can't we hear more Pete Rock and CL Smooth melodic type music?

Conventional wisdom will point to album sales and say these types of acts don't have high numbers hence they should not get played. However, Mobb Deep didn't do that well with their last album and we hear them all the time so what's really going?

We also have heard conventional wisdom from industry experts that says groups like The Roots or Little Brother are too smart and will go over the heads of the average listener. In other words the people are just too dumb to appreciate music that moves beyond being loud and having a monotonous 4 count.

In any case one can't deny we're at a crossroads. I'm not sure how it will all pan out but change is definitely needed...

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#1 New York, NY

Updated 5/22/2006

Spring '06 ARBITRENDS (February, March, April)

Pop: 15,332,000

Black: 2,710,700 (18%) Hispanic: 3,212,500 (21%) Asian: 787,047 (5%)

Station Format Owner..... Spr 05... Sum 05... Fall 05... Win 06... F/M/A 06

WLTW AC Clear Channel.....6.1... 5.8... 7.4... 6.6... 7.1

WSKQ Spanish SBS.....4.8...4.2...4.5...5.6...5.6

WHTZ Top 40/M Clear Channel...3.9...4.2...4.4...4.7...4.7

WRKS Urban AC Emmis.....4.7...5.5...4.5...4.4...4.5

WPAT Spanish SBS.....2.9...3.2...3.7...4.5...4.4

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WINS-A News CBS Radio.....3.7...4.2...4.2...4.1...4.0

WBLS Urban AC Inner City.....3.6...3.1...3.5...3.7...3.8

WWPR Urban Clear Channel... 4.0...4.6...4.1...3.9...3.7

WQHT Top 40/R Emmis.....4.3...4.5...4.3...3.7...3.5

WABC-A Talk ABC.....3.2...3.6...3.4...3.5...3.3

WAXQ Classic Rock Clear Channel...3.5...3.2...2.7...3.0...3.3

WQCD Smooth Jazz Emmis.....2.9...3.0...3.1...2.9...3.0

WKTU Top 40/R Clear Channel...3.0...3.0...2.7...2.7...2.8

WCAA/WZAA Spanish Univision.....2.4...2.8...2.8...2.4...2.5

WCBS-A News CBS Radio.....3.0...2.7...3.1...2.5...2.4

WQXR Classical NY Times 2.6... 1.8... 2.3... 2.7... 2.4

WPLJ Hot AC ABC 2.4... 2.2... 2.2 ... 2.1 ... 2.3

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WFAN-A Sports CBS Radio 2.6... 2.7... 2.7... 2.2... 2.2

WOR-A Talk Buckley 2.3... 2.1... 2.2... 2.1... 2.2

WCBS-F AC CBS Radio 3.0... 1.5... 1.7... 1.5... 1.7

WNEW AC CBS Radio 2.0 2.3 1.8 1.8 1.7

WADO-A Spanish Univision 1.3 1.4 1.2 1.5 1.2

WFNY Talk CBS Radio 3.4 3.2 3.2 1.1 1.1

WALK AC Clear Channel 0.9 1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0

WLIB-A Talk Inner City 1.0 1.2 1.4 0.8 1.0

#2 Los Angeles, CA

Updated 5/23/2006

Spring '06 ARBITRENDS (February, March, April)

Pop: 10,790,100

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Black: 822,300 (8%) Hispanic: 4,422,000 (41%) Asian: 0 (0%)

Station Format Owner Spr 05 Sum 05... Fall 05... Win 06... F/M/A 06

KLVE Spanish Univision 4.0... 4.2... 4.3... 4.8 ... 4.9

KIIS Top 40/M Clear Channel 4.7... 4.4... 4.3... 4.9 ... 4.6

KFI-A Talk Clear Channel 3.9... 4.0... 4.0... 4.0... 4.5

KSCA Regional Mexican Univision 4.0... 3.5... 3.8... 4.2... 4.4

KLAX Regional Mexican SBS 4.0... 3.7... 3.3... 4.3... 4.1

KBUA/KBUE Mexican Liberman 3.1... 3.1... 3.3... 3.6... 3.9

KOST AC Clear Channel 3.7... 3.1... 4.4... 3.8... 3.8

KROQ Alternative CBS Radio 3.7... 3.8... 3.9... 3.5... 3.5

KCBS Adult Hits CBS Radio 3.0... 3.4... 2.9... 3.4... 3.3

KTWV Smooth Jazz CBS Radio 3.8... 3.0... 3.2... 3.3... 3.3

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KRCD/KRCV Spanish Univision 2.6... 2.5... 3.2 ... 3.4... 3.2

KXOL Urban SBS 2.0... 4.2... 3.6 ... 3.2... 3.0

KPWR Top 40/R Emmis 4.2... 4.0... 3.5... 3.2... 2.8[u]

KRTH Oldies CBS Radio 2.5... 2.7... 2.7... 2.7... 2.8

KHHT R&B Oldies Clear Channel 2.9... 3.0... 2.8... 2.4... 2.4

KSSE Spanish Entravision 2.4... 2.3... 2.2... 2.4... 2.3

KABC-A Talk ABC 2.1... 2.5... 2.4... 2.3... 2.2

KBIG Hot AC Clear Channel 1.9... 2.3... 2.3... 2.1... 2.1

KLOS Classic Rock ABC 2.0... 2.1... 2.1... 1.9... 2.1

KKBT Urban Radio One 3.2... 2.5... 2.4... 1.9... 1.8

KZLA Country Emmis 1.8 1.9 1.7 1.8 1.8

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KNX-A News CBS Radio 1.5 1.7 1.7 1.6 1.6

KJLH Urban AC Taxi 1.4 1.5 1.6 1.4 1.5

KLSX Talk CBS Radio 2.3 2.5 2.2 1.5 1.5

KMZT Classical Mount Wilson 1.6 1.6 1.5 1.5 1.5

KYSR Hot AC Clear Channel 1.9 1.8 1.8 1.6 1.5

KFWB-A News CBS Radio 1.6 1.4 1.2 1.3 1.3

KHJ-A Spanish Liberman -- 0.8 0.8 1.0 1.2

KLYY Tropical Entravision 1.7 1.3 1.2 1.3 1.2

KRLA-A Talk Salem -- 1.0 0.8 1.0 1.0

KTLK-A Talk Clear Channel 0.8 0.9 0.7 1.0 1.0