

From Blank Slate To Brand Building

More Ideas To Promote Your HD2 Channels

By Bob Barnett

Last week in this space, longtime radio consultant and Jetcast exec Tom Zarecki shared some ideas for how primary stations can promote their HD2 side channels. This week, WKIS-Miami PD Bob Barnett shares how his station has promoted its Gretchen 99.9 side channel during its first 18 months on the air.

When WKIS-Miami launched HD2 channel Gretchen 99.9 in September 2005, we understood that the ramp-up time for HD Radio growth would likely be slow. So we decided early on that streaming the HD2 channel would be a great way to introduce this new station to listeners. Just as we viewed streaming WKIS via our homepage as an additional channel of product distribution, we believed streaming the HD2 station could also serve as a free trial for curious consumers to check out the new listening options.

But we didn't stop there; we also capitalized on a major concert — including an appearance by the HD2 station's namesake — to get the word out.

The station was originally launched to coincide with the release of country singer Gretchen Wilson's *All Jacked Up* CD in fall 2005. With Wilson's direct involvement in voicing the imaging and promo content on the station, Gretchen 99.9 was born.

The official rollout took place at KISS Country's annual Chili Cook-Off Festival in January 2006, featuring Wilson's co-headlining performance with Keith Urban. More than 40,000 were introduced to the new station via signage, advertising, HD Radio giveaways, on-site broadcasts between acts, listening stations inside the venue, and a promotional assault that ran simultaneous to KISS Country's. To concertgoers, it looked like two stations were cooperating in promoting the show.

Gretchen 99.9 is a more traditional, male-targeted, edgier version of the primary station. The strategy was to keep the product compatible with the programming on the main channel to help stimulate potential sampling opportunities. We believed it would be a lot easier to go to the existing KISS Country cume and introduce them to another flavor of country than trying to entice them to sample a completely different musical genre.

As Gretchen surpasses the 18-month mark, it's all about continued product development, brand enhancement, and marketing outreach. The station now has its own dedicated website (Gretchen999.com), and we're utilizing that Internet stream to build a loyal listener base. Also, while the number isn't nearly as large as the streaming figures on our primary channel, Beasley's Internet division reports 10,000+ unique users per month listening to the Gretchen online broadcast — via a link at WKIS.com — for an average of about 2 hours per visit. Not overly impressive in the big picture, but certainly reason for tempered optimism.



Beasley's involvement in the HD Digital Radio Alliance has also helped. Thanks to the Alliance's partnership with Wal-Mart, local stores have provided us with "Gretchen" signage and audio broadcasts at point-of-purchase displays in their locations. It's a step in the right direction. Now, a consumer can walk in and "touch" the new technology they've been hearing about.

Additionally, we are using a remote sampling kiosk at on-location broadcasts, and our station vehicles are equipped with HD radios for street-level sampling. Also, we continue to utilize tactical HD radio giveaways, etc., in an effort to expose the station to listeners and educate consumers about HD technology.

While the introduction phase has been slow and steady, it appears to be working as well as one would hope in these early stages: Free sampling promotes trial via online listening, which appears to be leading the early adopter fans to seek more information and, in some cases, to actually purchase HD radios. And listener feedback has been over-the-top positive.

As a programmer, I'm more concerned about the content development than the technology itself. No one really knows if HD Radio — as we have rolled it out thus far — will ever connect with consumers. But it's still very early in the game, and the great news is that the radio industry has been forced to rethink its product development efforts, and start creating additional listening experiences for consumers who have grown bored with a steady diet of ultra-safe, narrow, homogenized, generic programming options.

We're so focused on instant gratification that some in the industry refuse to be patient, and so they are blind to the possibilities. We all need to re-imagine the long-term benefits of this "radio of tomorrow," and maximizing the potential of this emerging technology is the first step. 📻



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