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CONTEMPORARY HIT RADIO

Four-Way Seattle Battle Rages On

KUBE, KPLZ, KNBQ, And KHIT Have Their Say

CHR listeners in Seattle can choose from four distinct flavors. Old favorite KUBE is facing pressure from three contenders, and showed an 8.0 to 5.5 dip in the winter Arbitron. KPLZ is aggressive and youthful, with lots of energy and a healthy gain from 4.6 to 5.2. Down the road, KNBQ fights the signal and image problems of being a Tacoma station, and the ravages of a sale, showing 2.7 to 2.2. And entering the arena for a second time is KHIT, with an improved signal backed by big bucks, which grew from 1.4 to 1.8.

'May Have Overshot Teens'

KUBE PD Gary Bryan is no stranger to Seattle. He was the first PD to take KNBQ live CHR in 1979 and stayed until 1983 when he moved to crosstown AOR KISW. He returned to 'UBE last year after signing on KKRZ/Portland.

Bryan believes his station's disappointing 12+ numbers were due to the entire KISW airstaff's defection to KXRX during the latter's shift to Classic Rock. "This really unbalanced the cume, so I'm not sure if this book is a true reading," he comments. "If I had to pinpoint any weakness on our part, perhaps we may have overshot the teens in our efforts to keep the upper demos satisfied. We've made corrections in this area, primarily with music — we're now 70% current in afternoons and nights — but I don't think the other CHRs hurt us."

While KUBE used no TV, it had buscards. Bryan adds, "We've shifted into a revitalization of the KUBE rear window sticker. There are over 2.2 million in distribution



Casey Keating

over the last three years, and a new shipment of one million is being handed out now."

On-air topicality plays a part in station promotions. For example, the station is conducting an ongoing campaign to convince Brian Bosworth to play for the Seahawks. "We'll send him airfare if he decides to come," says Bryan. "We have a marching band ready to



Gary Bryan

play as he arrives, and a 'Bosworth Hope Chest' filled with mementos of the city from listeners who attended a 'Boz Cause Party.'"

Morning Man A Cornerstone

Bryan feels the station's cornerstone is its morning show. "I think we have the chance to be the high-cuming 12-54 monster all CHRs want to be, because of Charlie Brown. He was huge at KJR, and has been here since KUBE signed on. Together, he and sidekick Ty Flint are an institution."

But what about the competition? "When I came back to town I heard KPLZ a lot in the malls, but now KHIT is showing up a lot more. Mall listening is a good 18-24 female indicator, and KPLZ is being eroded by KHIT. 'HIT is a good-

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sounding station, but it's not in tune with the local market; all the airstaff are outsiders." (See sidebar, "That N.W. Vibe.")

"We'll see someone shake out of the format," he predicts. "We've rehired Tom Hutlyer as Asst. PD from (crosstown AC) KLSY. He's good enough to be PD one day, so

we're not going anywhere. Unless we make a lot of mistakes, KUBE is going to survive and thrive."

KPLZ Pushes Head-To-Head

When Casey Keating was upped from Production Director to PD at KPLZ a year ago, he surprised those who had called him a dark horse.

"The competition has made everyone stronger," he comments. "We've all knuckled down and are using bigger and better ammo. (KPLZ owner) Golden West has committed more funds for promotions, which makes things all the more exciting."

KPLZ is going head-to-head with KUBE in a bumper sticker campaign. "Our 'Z-Stickers' are showing up everywhere. We're trying to entice the market to try something different. And our prizes are competitive with KUBE; we hand out \$50 to \$1000 to winners choosing envelopes offered by the van driver."

Keating gave up the station's former "K-Plus" identity in favor of "K-P-L-Z," "The Z," or "Z101.5." "As in the K-Plus days, we're still first with the hits. We



Ron Erak

skew a bit younger. You have nothing to lose by playing new music, if it's properly dayparted until widely accepted. You need mainstream artists, but taking chances on good music isn't taking chances. We surround everything that's a new current with something familiar, going as far back as three years."

Creativity and positive energy are strong parts of the station's image. "Fun and action is what I want when anyone tunes in. I send the morning show, Kent Phillips and Alan Budwill, out to weird places for remotes. My night guy (and MD) Mark Allan does his show from backstage at concerts. You have to bring back the drama

That Northwest Vibe

Is there something different about the Pacific Northwest, Seattle in particular, that makes it a more difficult market for an outside programmer?

Gary Bryan: There is a real regionalism to the market. It's almost like a regional chauvinism; i.e., Texas has its own attitude, as does the NE around Boston. There's a certain type of local culture to understand to be in touch with the audience. People move here because they enjoy the purity of the environment and the recreational opportunities. The overall positive attitude about life in the Northwest precludes a lot of on-air cynicism.

Casey Keating: The musical texture is similar to Canada, or the type of music they like in Australia. It's a different kind of place. For this reason Urban crossovers have to be of the blue-eyed variety to do well.

Steve Weed: As an outsider, I can assure you the myth that you can't play Urban music here is just a myth. Seattle isn't really that different, it's just been an isolated market.

and imagery of radio. A studio is too restrictive. When you have people who can go out and carry on with the public, it's to your station's benefit.

"This station is glad to have the 12-24 numbers locked up — we're growing because we know where they live and how to attract them. Maybe that's why we invited Ozzy Osbourne to guest jock on the morning show. You've never heard anything like Ozzy introducing Lionel Richie."

KNBQ Revamping For Attack

Ron Erak is a market native, with radio experience both in and outside Seattle. Interestingly, he's a former KUBE Production Direc-

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tor. "Growing up here, I know the nuances of the folks," he says. "That's going to help when our signal is boosted. You can't get numbers where you can't be heard."

During the ownership switch to Viacom, KNBQ was permitted to move its tower to Tiger Mountain, allowing it signal parity. But with the recent exits of GM Jack Bankson and OM Don Hofmann, there was little Erak could share about the road ahead — except that KNBQ wasn't about to change format.

"From what I can tell, Viacom is into diversified industries, treating radio the same way and winning in every market. There is a nine-year heritage here, being the market's first FM CHR. We've been through some bumpy roads because of the sale, and have nowhere to go but up."

Erak predicted a format defection by one of the four, but pointed to his own station's strength. "Our cume is strong, so our main thrust will be strategy for the next couple of months. Musically we're the most straightforward CHR and

aren't doing anything to draw special attention to ourselves — you'll just hear a lot of music.

"We're walking up the stairs one at a time. The sale put everything on hold. Our lack of a promotion budget makes us like a plant that's



Steve Weed

needed a good watering for two years. Now we're going to add sunshine and pour in water and fertilizer to help it grow."

KHIT Relunched

KHIT debuted on July 4, 1984, offered a \$1 million prize in its first contest . . . and barely dented the book. Despite a good presentation, the signal wasn't adequate. Bingham sold KHIT in September '86, and Gannett officially kicked off its second debut January 9, 1987.

"We moved the signal away from the only listeners it ever had, 30 miles out of town on Gold Mountain," says PD Steve Weed. "Now the tower is in the heart of downtown and being heard by many for the first time."

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Weed adds that being at 106.9 — the low-traffic end of the dial — isn't a big help, either. "When we got here, we inherited no air studios or production facilities. This is a real ground-zero start."

So far, ratings progress has been slow. "We could impact the numbers quicker if we geared the station directly toward teens. We won't chase them away, but we're

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