

[The Infinite Dial](#)

Constructive Dialogue On The Future Of Audio Entertainment, from [Edison Media Research](#). [RSS Feed](#).

[First Listen: The U.K.'s First Jack FM](#)

Written [Oct. 18, 2007](#) by Sean Ross in [Content](#) with [0 Comments](#)



The idea of doing Jack-FM in Europe has always presented a different set of challenges. After all, it's not that long ago that most stations played more than 1,000 songs and spanned four decades -- and that was just the Top 40s! And the BBC's Hot AC/Triple-A hybrid Radio 2 has done a pretty good job as establishing itself as the home of eclectic variety for adults. So we were very eager to hear our friend [Clive Dickens' Jack-FM 106 Oxford, U.K.](#), which launched this morning.

The good news is that if you're in the U.K., Jack-FM will begin to stream the minute you open its Website--something we strongly believe in. Unfortunately, because of British industry licensing issues, that stream won't open if you're outside the U.K. But we did manage to hear Jack-FM on its first day to pass along the details.

Certain elements of the station will be familiar to anybody who has heard the version that became the U.S. template. The station is, at least on its first day, jockless, although there is a morning show and news reports in afternoons. There are liners about going into stopsets ("It's not you, it's us. We need a break"). There are a lot of cold segues. There's a liner about an "iPod on spin cycle." And there is, of course, "Playing What We Want." (Our favorite liner: "Two radios did it and Jack-FM was born. We might not have been planned, but we *are* loved.")

What's different? The voice of the station isn't Howard Cogan, but one Paul Darrow. There are also a few more attempts to explain how the station works, compared to its U.S. counterparts, which sometimes felt like they didn't need any stinking positioning beyond "playing what we want." And the Grace Jones song notwithstanding, this station is more focused pop/rock than many of its U.S. counterparts. (And if there's anywhere where you'd have permission to go heavier on Rhythm and goofy one-off pop novelties, it would be the U.K., where both of those have always been part of the pop charts.)

If this Jack works in the U.K., it will do so by pulling off one or both of the following. It will function as the Classic Rock station--a format that has only gained any kind of traction in the U.K. in the last decade or so. Or it will manage to position itself as a more focused version of BBC Radio 2 (and, to a lesser extent, Virgin Radio).

"Variety without the gratuitous eclecticism" is a hard position to pull off, but some of the U.S. Jack-FMs did manage it. For all that was written about Jack-FM's ability to destroy the variety image of Hot ACs, it also stunted the growth of some heritage Triple-A stations, as some listeners came to realize that they were happier with a variety of familiar songs than just variety for variety's sake.

Here is Jack-FM at 2:10 p.m. local time on its first day:

Duran Duran, "Save A Prayer" (1982 in the UK)
Guns N' Roses, "Sweet Child O' Mine" (1989 in the UK)
Bryan Adams, "Cloud No. 9" (1999, UK/Canada hit)
Wings, "Live & Let Die" (1973)
Coldplay, "Speed Of Sound" (2004)
Cutting Crew, "(I Just) Died In Your Arms" (1986)
Eagles, "Life In The Fast Lane" (1977)
Maroon 5, "This Love" (2004)
Bon Jovi, "It's My Life" (2000)
Grace Jones, "Pull Up To The Bumper" (a UK hit in 1986)
Andrew Gold, "Never Let Her Slip Away" (1978)
ZZ Top, "Gimme All Your Lovin'" (1984 in the UK)
Lighthouse Family, "Run" (2001)
Squeeze, "Take Me I'm Yours" (1978)
Iggy Pop, "The Passenger" (1977)
Human League, Mirror Man (1982)
Oasis, "Champagne Supernova" (1995)
James Morrison, "You Give Me Something" (2006)
Free, "Wishing Well" (1973)
Carly Simon, "Why" (1982)
Aerosmith, "Dude (Looks Like A Lady)" (1990 in the UK)
Jackson Browne, "Doctor My Eyes" (1972--although, interestingly, it was actually Michael Jackson (!) who had the U.K. hit with this song)
Prince, "The Most Beautiful Girl In The World" (1994)
Rolling Stones, "Tumbling Dice" (1972)
Julian Lennon, "Too Late For Goodbyes" (1985)
Five For Fighting, "Superman (It's Not Easy)" (2001)

[Where Is Radio TiVo?](#)

Written [Oct. 18, 2007](#) by **Larry Rosin** in [Technology](#) with **0 Comments**

I have been a TiVo user, and TiVo lover for over four years now. Like most TiVo users, watching television without TiVo has become a frustration -- often I am in a hotel room searching for the non-existent pause or rewind button while watching a ballgame or other show.

And, I just as often find myself searching for the same phantom buttons when listening to the radio. My mind wanders as the announcer reads the traffic report . . . and I want to back it up. I receive a call on my cell phone right in the middle of a funny morning-show bit and I just wish I could hit the pause button. I hear a fascinating story on Public Radio and I just so wish I could record it for later playback in my car.

Once you have consumed media in the TiVo way, it is just so hard to go back to traditional media usage.

Since over-the-air radio isn't going to get these functionalities anytime soon it is essential that we fill

in the blanks as best as we can.

At minimum over-the-air radio broadcasters need to make podcasting much more robust; Public Radio has amazing offerings of their programming on their Web sites that really do allow me to listen later -- albeit not (yet) easily in my car. But as of today only a tiny fraction of commercial radio stations make their morning show or other non-music content easily available from their web sites.

Millions of television viewers are now trained to DVR functionality. Radio needs to program with this new kind of media consumer in mind.

[The Long And Short Of It](#)

Written [Oct. 17, 2007](#) by Sean Ross in [Content](#) with [0 Comments](#)

Edison's Larry Rosin and I have had a lot of discussions about song length. How many times, he has often asked, does one really need to hear the oft-repeated hooks of "Crazy In Love" or "Jumpin' Jumpin'"? Larry has gone as far as suggesting that in this day of busy schedules and short attention spans, there might be a place for a Top 40 station that edits the songs to give you more of the hits faster.

Using that as a departure, I *have* found myself lately thinking that a CHR that took songs down to 3-1/2 minutes could play 14-15 records an hour and, perhaps, enjoy the same sort of subliminal advantage that some PDs believe exist in speeding up the records. And these days, a few more of the hits are coming in under 3:30 anyway. But could you get "Lovestoned/I Think She Knows" under 3:30 and maintain most of the Justin Timberlake song's changes? "Until The End Of Time"? "Welcome To The Black Parade"?

The interesting part here is that many of today's listeners are used to truncated songs anyway. Urban and Rhythmic Top 40 listeners have been hearing mixes as a significant part of their stations' programming for more than a decade, and Mainstream Top 40 listeners are hearing more and more. And no matter how hit-driven PDs would like their mixers to be, the airwaves often fill up with songs, old or new, that wouldn't otherwise be on the radio.

This was driven home for me tonight when I came across [WWPR \(Power 105\) New York's](#) night jock DJ Clue while he was in a mix. The record that caught my attention was Soul IV Real's 1995 hit, "Every Little Thing I Do," not a record you hear much on the radio these days. I was still enjoying it when that song segued into Truth Hurts' "Addictive," a big R&B hit that pretty much disappeared instantly after it ran its course in the summer of 2002. That one got a verse and two choruses before Beyonce's "Naughty Girl." Hearing that one wasn't special for me and by then I was in the driveway. A little more of "Addictive" might have kept the motor running for another minute or so anyway.

So how is it, then, that a radio station must play all 4:40 of a song, if that's what the label gives them as the single edit, when a song is new, but five years later, must not play more than 90 seconds of it? And here's another one to ponder: What's safer from a programming standpoint? Pulling out "Addictive" or "Every Little Thing I Do" once in a blue moon but surrounding them with hits and letting them play all the way through? Or stacking up 20 minutes comprised largely of songs that don't sustain--even if you play only a few minutes of each?

[Where Can You Find More Music Variety -- On FM or Satellite Radio?](#)

Written [Oct. 17, 2007](#) by [Larry Rosin](#) in [Content](#) + [Satellite](#) with [0 Comments](#)

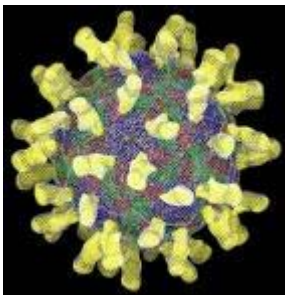
A big part of the original promise of Satellite Radio was vastly enhanced variety -- not only across the channels but on those channels that duplicated over-the-air formats.

In this week's [Ross on Radio column](#) from Edison Media Research VP Sean Ross, he looks at whether one truly gets more musical variety from some of satellite's most listened-to channels.

We already have a lot of comments to the article -- as Sean's articles receive almost every week. [Join the discussion!](#)

[Viral Marketing vs. Word of Mouth](#)

Written [Oct. 17, 2007](#) by [Tom Webster](#) in [Marketing](#) with [0 Comments](#)



Seth Godin notes an interesting exchange between a college student and his professor on the supposed existence of Viral Marketing, and notes that (despite the professor's position) that [Viral Marketing is NOT the same thing as Word of Mouth](#). I certainly agree with that, but I am not sure that I am willing to settle for Godin's distinction that Viral Marketing is a compounding function, and word of mouth a decaying function. I think it really depends on what your position is on the function of "Marketing" in the firm. It is true that an ideavirus, as Godin puts it, spreads through a population logarithmically, not linearly, and does so with little post-launch effort on the part of the marketer. I also agree 100% that "constant harassment of the population" does not make something 'viral;' you cannot **will** an ideavirus into propagating.

Where I disagree with Godin is in his implication that Word of Mouth is ephemeral (he notes that it "amplifies the marketing action then fades, usually quickly") or somehow inferior to unleashing a true ideavirus (which he equates to "Winning the Lottery.") If your vision of the Marketing Function is to increase awareness, then perhaps I could get behind these characterizations. But if your definition of Marketing is the ongoing process of moving people closer to a "sale," then I am not so sure.

Missing from Godin's equation is the means of transmission. With viral marketing, it's easy come, easy go. Someone passes a meme, link or funny video to me, and I pass it along to my distribution list. Maybe I have been moved to action, maybe not--but I have transmitted the message. The message is meant to be independent of the messenger, and is propagated on its own merits.

Word of Mouth, on the other hand, relies much more on the ethos of the messenger. If a friend tells me to try a certain restaurant or product, I probably will. But I can be a complete teetotaler and spread a funny video from Budweiser. In the first case, though my friend may have only influenced a handful of people, those people may be closer to the sale, which is the point of marketing in the first place. The Internets are loaded with 'ideaviruses' that became the hot pass-around links of the summer--but can anyone remember the products or services they were marketing, or more importantly, did anyone buy them?

This is not to suggest that Viral Marketing is somehow inferior to Word of Mouth marketing--merely that they address the consumer at different points along the customers' decision-making continuum. And in that, I agree with Godin--they are different.

[Seven Habits Of A Highly Effective Radio Station](#)

Written [Oct. 16, 2007](#) by Sean Ross in [Content](#) + [Social Networking](#) with [0 Comments](#)

When wireless broadband finally brings The Infinite Dial to my car, the stations that get a button will be a lot different. I'll have a regular choice for obscure classic rock (Suburban Phoenix's KCDX), my Country station will be KEEY (K102) Minneapolis, and my replacement for New York's Jack-FM will be one of the original ones from Canada (although I still have to decide between Vancouver and Calgary).

But my first button for Top 40 will be still be my local Top 40, [WHTZ \(Z100\)](#). Covering the radio business from New York--a market that doesn't always have the best-in-category of any given genre--has been frustrating over the years. But I've generally been happy with Z100 over the last decade. Z100 emerged [as the market leader in New York's last diary Arbitron ratings yesterday](#). And they deserved to.

Here are some of the things that Z100 does right:

- * Even in market No. 1, where they would certainly be entitled to be conservative, they find their own hit records. And while it doesn't happen as often as some industry folks might wish, they will occasionally play songs that are not on any other reporting Top 40 station.
- * They pay a lot of attention to pop culture. Z100 is usually the first stop (and always among the first stops) for Radio Disney artists on their way to the mainstream, from Hilary Duff to Vanessa Hudgens to the Jonas Brothers to Miley Cyrus, whose "See You Again" is in rotation *only* at Z100 and XM-20.
- * It makes good use of library material. During its late '90s success, Z100 was a Top 40 station that did several music tests a year. It reportedly has returned to library testing recently and has been filtering in a lot of unusual titles. And somehow it gets away with "Iris" by the Goo Goo Dolls and "Ayo Technology" by 50 Cent on the same radio station.
- * In fact, Z100 uses both current and library testing the way most of us would like to see them used--to intelligently take more shots on music, not fewer.
- * They do a good job of associating themselves with new platforms (a lot of the on-air real-estate now is going to the station's social networking site, [the Z-Zone](#)).
- * Z100 makes good use of benchmarking during the day. There are as many regular features between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. (the hours when I tend to hear the station most) as most morning shows.
- * They have made better use than most of Clear Channel's new presentational austerity without sounding sterilized by it. (It usually feels like some thought went into the cold segue between the first and second record of the hour, for instance.)

[Please Commercial Radio -- Test The Commercials](#)

Written [Oct. 16, 2007](#) by Larry Rosin in [Content](#) with [0 Comments](#)

Jerry Lee from [WBEB \(B101\) Philadelphia](#) has been enjoying a deserved spate of praise for his many unique positions.

I'd like to back him up on his pleas to have radio test their commercials. He of course is so right that the advertiser would find radio all the more effective if he engaged in testing before running spots.

But the listener would benefit so much as well. They would not only hear better commercials, more crucially they would hear bad commercials less often. We sometimes forget that spots can 'rotate' at levels even the most aggressive Top 40 station would never tolerate. Just as you wouldn't play a bad song over and over, you should not be playing commercials that are sending the listener away.

Hire Jerry, or hire Edison, or hire someone -- but please radio do as Jerry says: Test The Commercials.

[The TV Version of The HD Radio Alliance](#)

Written [Oct. 15, 2007](#) by **Larry Rosin** in with [1 Comment](#)

I've been consistently amazed when I talk with radio people about the impending shift of television to digital-only how few know about it. Indeed, on February 18, 2009 -- just 16 months from now -- television will be turning off its analog signals. You will no longer be able to watch television on an analog television -- your old Sony Watchman will not work at the football game any longer. ALL analog televisions will not work any longer without a converter box.

Radio's television cousins are about to engage in a marketing campaign to explain this to the public. In that it will involve the notion that your old television simply will not work any longer, I'm wondering what the potential spillover impact might be in radio? Might people think that their radios won't work either?

And while I'm asking questions, try this one on...what would happen if radio DID turn off the analog signals in the future? How many people would buy the necessary converter boxes or new, digital radios?

[Leaving Deeper Footprints](#)

Written [Oct. 15, 2007](#) by **Tom Webster** in [Content](#) + [Social Networking](#) with [0 Comments](#)

Here is a great example of 'leaving deeper footprints,' a phrase I first heard from Scott Shannon 15 years ago. If you have never ordered shoes from [Zappos](#), you are missing out on the best customer service on the web, and [this blog post from a Zappos customer](#) epitomizes why.

Leaving deeper footprints is something great stations do on a regular basis. One of the best places to find them in Country radio is on [Jaye Albright's blog](#)--she makes a regular point of celebrating the great things that Country radio stations do everyday for their communities. What are some of your favorite radio examples? Post them here--I bet this thread could crash our servers, and I hope it does.

[Moving Forward With The HD Radio Alliance](#)

Written [Oct. 15, 2007](#) by **Sean Ross** in [HD Radio](#) with [1 Comment](#)

You may have read by now that the [HD Radio Alliance has loosened its rules](#) for the next year to allow limited sponsorships on HD-2 multicast channels, as well as making it easier for owners to change format on their HD-2 channels without clearing it with the other Alliance members. Stations are now also allowed to promote their own HD-2 channels instead of the generic HD Radio spots that have become a subject of derision in some quarters.

The best news here is that it shuts down the biggest excuse that most broadcasters have for the

benign neglect that goes into *most* multicast channels: Why should I improve my HD-2 station if I can't make any money with it? Most HD-2 stations, despite their limited available over-the-air audience, still have Webstreams and broadcasters are doing a little better at selling those these days. And as we head toward The Infinite Dial, that is probably where most of these stations will be consumed anyway.

As for divvying the formats, I can only say that in New York, the previous rules never really served their purpose of keeping HD-2 channels away from existing formats or from each other. At least two HD-2 multicast formats in this market would seem to be direct competitors of terrestrial stations. WWPR-HD-2 (Power Latino) covers the same ground as WCAA (La Calle). The Gospel format on WRKS-HD-2 preceded a commercial Gospel format on rival Inner City's WLIB-AM, but it certainly didn't go away once there was a Gospel station available.

Then there's almost everybody else. Technically, Deep Cuts Classic Rock WAXQ-HD-2, Soft AC WLTW-HD-2, "Jack-FM" WCBS-FM-HD_2, and WPLJ's '70s and '80s stations are entirely different formats. (And I can certainly say that I've never heard Sammy Johns' "Chevy Van," a WPLJ-2 staple, on any other station.) But they all cover a lot of the same '70s/'80s territory as each other and (in most cases) their HD-1 counterparts.

Meanwhile, New York still has only one HD-2 station expressly devoted to new music (WHTZ-HD-2) or that could be said to be in any way targeted to the next generation of radio listeners (again WHTZ-2). It provides no special audience programming not already found on analog radio--it's hard to imagine that a Caribbean or Bollywood channel, or Clear Channel's existing gay-targeted channel, wouldn't find a larger New York audience willing to buy HD receivers than most of what exists now. And for all the '70s/'80s pop/rock overlap, there's not even a *variety* of old music: no Classic Country, no R&B Gold, no '80s Alternative, although all of those things exist on satellite radio.

I don't want to again belabor my lack of HD-2 choices--[something that I've made a regular topic here](#). But a lot of the changes in the Alliance rules are the sort of common-sense things that many broadcasters we speak to have privately wished for. Multicast stations have been and will remain hampered by the same lack of resources that all stations deal with these days. So one hopes that these other changes will make it easier for the medium to move forward.

[Most Honest Liner Since "We Suck Less"](#)

Written [Oct. 12, 2007](#) by Sean Ross in [HD Radio](#) with [0 Comments](#)

Heard tonight on [WCBS-HD-2](#), New York's home of "Jack FM" ever since it was exiled to the HD-2/Webstream to make room for the return of Oldies (and imagine the trademark sound of Jack-FM voice Howard Cogan here): "ILikeJack.com: It's better than no Jack-FM at all."

[Finding '50s, Early '60s Oldies On The Radio](#)

Written [Oct. 12, 2007](#) by Sean Ross in [Content](#) + [HD Radio](#) + [Internet Radio](#) with [6 Comments](#)

The call came from somebody outside the business who had found an [old Ross On Radio column](#) about the former [WRLI \(Real Oldies 1690\) Chicago](#) and its pre-Beatles format. When the 1690 frequency became the new home of News/Talk WVON, the old format remained on-line and he continued to listen. But now, he said, even that stream was starting to filter in some music from the mid-to-late '60s. What about all those other stations I wrote about at the time, back in 2003-'04 when many in the industry were hoping that pre-Beatles Oldies would allow every Adult Standards station in America to update?

Sorry, many of those stations are gone as well: no more WWKB Buffalo, N.Y., WSAI Cincinnati, WCOL Columbus, Ohio, or WKAP Allentown, Pa. Of those stations, only WKAP got significant ratings traction for a while. Others, like [WOKY Milwaukee](#), quickly settled in a mix of eras not that different from the FM stations they replaced. (I just checked out WOKY and it was playing "Lyin' Eyes.")

WRLL's Web stream, by the way, still plays a lot of pre-Beatles music. When I flipped them on, they were going from Little Willie John to Eddie Cochran to the Flamingos. But there was also "Michelle" by the Beatles and "Sunny Afternoon" by the Kinks. And even on new Oldies AMs like [WMTR Morristown, N.J.](#), and [CKWW \(AM580\) Detroit](#) that play some pre-Beatles songs that you don't usually hear elsewhere, you're still going to hear late '60s and even early '70s. Only the '50s channels on [Sirius](#) and [XM](#) continue to concentrate primarily on pre-Beatles and, remember, even they are adding a little early '60s to their original '50s emphasis.

A lot of the pre-Beatles Oldies AMs were claimed by the rise of Air America and liberal talk. And when the rush to blow up Oldies FMs slowed down a little this year, there wasn't the same sense of opportunity that had existed a few years ago. My favorite station for obscure oldies, WNYH Long Island, N.Y., plays a broad mix that ranges from standards to '70s with a lot of deep pre-Beatles in between. But they don't stream yet.

So it's hard if you're a purist. But here are some stations that might be worth checking out:

- * KXKL (Kool 105) Denver's ["Kool 105 Classics" HD-2 channel](#): Kool 105 has made the same era move into the '70s as most of its counterparts. But their HD-2 station has picked up the slack; it went from the Flamingos into the Ronettes into Paul Anka when I turned it on this morning.
- * The "Real Oldies" format at the [Clear Channel Format Lab](#): It was created by the same people who gave us WRLL, WSAI, and many of the others. But it now contains mid-to-late '60s as well.
- * [WMID](#) Atlantic City: Again, I heard Mitch Ryder's "Sock It To Me! Baby," which is never a problem for me, but I also heard the Angels into Johnny Mathis' little-known "Small World." And they bill themselves as "broadcasting from the doo-wop capital of the world."
- * [WMTR](#) - As previously mentioned, they've moved into the late '60s and early '70s now--not nearly as deep as they were a year ago when it was possible to hear a Royal Teens song other than "Short Shorts." But there's still a lot of pre-Beatles music on there. And it's still the station I go to when I have an urge to hear "Killer Joe" by the Rocky-Fellers.
- * Suburban Detroit's [WPON](#), which bills itself as "talk and rare Oldies."
- * WSAI's successor, [WDJO](#), which has some of the same staffers and plays a 50/50 mix of pre- and post-Beatles.

For what it's worth, I miss the pre-Beatles AMs, too. I started listening to pop music in 1967, so a lot of the late '50s and early '60s are lost on me--particularly the Connie Francis/Neil Sedaka/Paul Anka ballads. But WSAI--the best of the category, I thought--was a well-produced, well-executed radio station, the kind that could make me sit through a song I didn't like. (Besides, they were all two-minute songs!) There are doubtlessly Internet-only stations specializing in pre-Beatles. But I'd rather hear them in the context of a full-service radio station.

But please chime in with your suggestions on pre-Beatles Oldies and where to hear them by clicking the comments tab above.

["Now" And Again](#)

Written [Oct. 11, 2007](#) by Sean Ross in with [0 Comments](#)

If you Google "Radio Now 93.1" today, the third entry is a [petition](#) asking [WNOU Indianapolis](#) owner Emmis to return the station to the air. Emmis exiled WNOU to HD-2 on Monday, making it the future home of News/Talk WIBC. It didn't take long. Radio One, which recently sold off two of its other Mainstream Top 40s, still saw value in picking up Mainstream Top 40 as [Radio Now 100.9](#) on the frequency of Jazz WYJZ. And they should have. WNOU was fifth in the market 12-plus at the time of its demise.

Seeing WNOU go away three days after WBZZ (B94) Pittsburgh was relaunched was [proof already that the current health of Top 40 was in the eye \(and pocketbook\) of the beholder](#). Emmis might have wanted the lucrative WIBC on FM. For a lower rated Smooth Jazz station, even younger targeted Top 40 was a more saleable proposition. And it's good news for those of us who remember the early '90s where brand name Top 40s went away and, in many markets, nobody moved in to replace them. (That said, there were also places where brand name Top 40s were replaced by rimshotters which went away a few years later themselves.)

By the way, if you want to hear the new Radio Now, you can do it [merely by opening the Website](#), something which many industry observers wish more stations would do.

[Madonna: Veterans And "Virgin" Territory](#)

Written [Oct. 11, 2007](#) by Sean Ross in with [1 Comment](#)

It's interesting how many of the big money deals in the music industry--including the one reported this morning between [Madonna and concert promoter Live Nation](#)--involve artists who have pretty much lost their footing at mainstream current-based radio in the U.S. Whether it's the issuing of David Bowie bonds in 1997 or ZZ Top's multi-album deal with RCA in 1992--six years after their final hit--there's something about the veterans that induces mad optimism. The Wall Street Journal quotes industry observers as saying that Madonna would have to sell 15 million copies of each of the next three albums. And while Madonna's talent for self-reinvention is legend, 15 million copies is no longer easy for any artist, particularly one whose last true U.S. Top 40 radio hits were 2001-02 (and that's assuming you count "Don't Tell Me" and "Die Another Day").

Then again, [as other observers have noted](#), that's not where Live Nation is likely expecting to really make its money back. The deal is an acknowledgement that Madonna, like Prince, Bruce Springsteen and other contemporaries, is more vital now as a touring act. And with labels now making deals that include participation in touring, there's no reason a concert promoter wouldn't want to be in the label business. As with Paul McCartney and Joni Mitchell's Starbucks deals, a lot of the non-traditional deals are actually codifications of what was happening anyway: veteran artists reaching their audiences through methods other than airplay at current-based radio.

There was, you'll recall, a minor controversy last year when Madonna's "Confessions on a Dance Floor" album -- by general consensus, her best in years -- didn't yield any Top 40 hits in this country. That led to a fan petition [claiming that Clear Channel stations were "boycotting" Madonna](#) because of her political views. So there's some irony in any deal with Live Nation, which was spun off from CC several years ago.

Of course, the real reason that "Confessions" didn't get traction in the U.S., is that Madonna had waited a few years too many to do what many were waiting for her to do -- go back to being the "old Madonna." Look at any artist who loses their foothold at Top 40 and you'll usually find a long stretch

of so-so singles that did become hits by the dint of their popularity--in her case, about 70% of what came between "Vogue" and "Ray Of Light." And while a truly great record will often will out, there does come a certain point where veterans have a really hard time getting back to Top 40, if only because they used up their goodwill earlier.

So on this week's Top 40 charts, the most consistent hitmakers represented are Pink, Nickelback, and Avril Lavigne--all of whom had their breakthroughs less than 10 years ago. Matchbox Twenty, Jennifer Lopez, Backstreet Boys and, of course, Britney Spears fight week-to-week to keep their momentum. The Eagles and Bruce Springsteen may have their best singles in years, but it's hard to ever imagine them on Top 40. There are a lot less multi-decade comebacks these days. Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons were hitmakers in the '60s, came back in 1975 after more than a few fallow years, and ended up on Top 40 again in 1994 thanks to the "December 1963" remix. Even with "Jersey Boys" and a new heavily publicized Valli album, that is unimaginable now, even if another remix just put the Four Seasons back on the charts in the U.K.

As a result, this has become a business of workarounds, whether it's the large-scale ones (Starbucks, Live Nation, Radiohead) or the smaller scale commercial tie-ins that foist Feist and Ingrid Michaelson into the mass consciousness and on to the sales charts without radio play. There are still true radio stars who also sell records--Justin Timberlake, Kanye West--but fewer and fewer. The music business is now experiencing Paul Simon's "days of miracle and wonder" (said here with all the irony that he attached to that line), and there will now be paradigm-shattering announcements on a weekly basis. But if Madonna and Live Nation come up with the record that gets her back on the radio, that will be paradigm-shattering too.

[Programming Ten Stations? You need this.](#)

Written [Oct. 11, 2007](#) by Tom Webster in with [0 Comments](#)

I correspond with lots of folks in Radio every day. Some really have a way with effective email communications, while others, to quote Steve Martin, not have way. Part of the reason is that we are very good about increasing responsibilities in this industry (i.e., "finding synergies," or to put it another way, "having the CHR guy also program the Sports/Talker") but do lag a bit in the teaching of the all-important "soft skills." So I offer this, one of my favorite links from one of my favorite bloggers, Merlin Mann. His "[Inbox Zero](#)" series at his productivity blog [43 Folders](#) is legendary, and worth linking here for those of you who haven't seen it. Quarter after quarter, I win Edison's coveted IT Director Gold Star for having the cleanest inbox on our Exchange server, and this is how I do it.

About The Infinite Dial

No longer bound 'between 88 and 108 on your local FM Dial', radio has been liberated and now can be found virtually anywhere. This is a site to track radio in all its forms.

We are fans of great radio, whether it be on AM, FM, Satellite, Internet, HD, a Podcast, in any country on earth, or on any platform. [The Infinite Dial](#) will explore, analyze, and keep you informed about all the intersections of broadcast media and technology.

Have something to contribute? [Just pop us a note](#) and we'll get right back to you!

Category Archives

- [30 Under 30](#) (31)
- [Advertising](#) (13)
- [Blogging](#) (9)

- [Content](#) (134)
- [HD Radio](#) (39)
- [Internet Radio](#) (50)
- [Marketing](#) (36)
- [Podcasting](#) (14)
- [Satellite](#) (8)
- [Social Networking](#) (3)
- [Technology](#) (33)

Google Search

WWW Infinite Dial

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