I'm a indie songwriter/artist/producer. I'm in the process ofpromoting my second self-produced CD--including seeking gigs, radio airplay, reviews, and increased webtraffic....all in an attempt to get my music heard, therby increasing sales. I'm currently in the process of promoting my music to college radio stations (and specialty shows on commercial radio) in NC.

Here are some stats on my music:

Number of full-length releases: 2
Other releases: 1 single
Total number of songs released: 24
Status: Unsigned/created my own record label
Current web traffic: 7,700 unique visitors/month

Local music can no longer be played on commercial radio during normal programming. Period. ClearChannel owns the major stations in the major markets, and it programs them from regional centers. For example, my hometown ClearChannel stations are not even programmed in my hometown. There is therefore nothing "local" about it. Additionally, commercial radio adds fewer than 10 new songs/week. The major labels spend thousands of dollars to radio promoters and spend thousands more in giveaways to ensure that they monopolize which new songs get added. This programming has nothing to do with local interests--you can turn on a commercial station in any major market in the region and hear the same 35 songs over and over.

As for specialty show programming, there are only 2 specialty shows on commercial radio in my state (NC) that will play regional music. Major and indie labels compete for these spots as well--using it to test market their newest bands. The specialty show in my hometown lasts 90 minutes on Sunday evenings (the worst time for ratings) and will give you a spin if you have a good recording and are promoting an upcoming gig. If you're really aggressive about gigging and contacting the dj, you may get as many as 5 spins over a few months...or you may get an interview or an in-studio performance.

In short, a really hard-working band in NC that releases a new local music CD is confined to 10 spins on commercial radio in their home state--all of which will happen at the times with the fewest people are listening.

That's the current commercial system.

College radio is more accepting. They will play unsigned artists. Here's how to get played on college radio in NC.
1. Get a list of college stations.
2. Use the Internet to find what type of music they play.
3. If they play your type of music, get their current address and contact info. (This could change ever semester.) In NC, there are 18 college stations that play my genre (alternative rock) music.
4. Contact each station to make sure their phone number and address is correct.
5. Prepare custom cover letters for each station.
6. Assemble and mail packages for each station.
7. The same day, email each station to let them know it's coming. Stations get HUNDREDS of CDs EACH WEEK. Also, major and indie labels hire radio promoters to work full-time on each of their releases.
8. Each week of your campaign (typically 8-10 weeks) send out a broadcast

email to all stations letting them know the latest news about your band.
9. Each week, call each station during their call hours to ask them if they received the package. (In colleges, a lot of the CDs end up "walking back to the dorm room".) Programmers get so many calls that they don't ever return their messages...so leaving a voice mail doesn't work. They often delete them without hearing them. Because they have classes and a life outside of the station, they aren't at the station very much...and they don't answer calls outside of their hours.
10. If they didn't receive the package, resend it.
11. Call every week until you have confirmed they take the CD to the meeting where they decide what to play.
12. Call every week until you hear that they actually play it.

If you do all this work, you may get a few spins on college radio....remember there are hundreds of new bands every week competing for these spots. Even with a few spins, you shouldn't expect any royalty income because:
a. you aren't getting enough airplay to be picked up by BMI, ASCAP, etc.
b. even if they play your music, they may not write it down on the chart that they send in...they promise these spots to record companies in exchange for freebies. So you can get played without getting charted, and major acts can get charted without getting played

Studies have shown that you must have about 5-7 exposures to someone before they buy your music. For example, after someone hears a band on the radio 3 times, sees a video, and has their friend tell them about the band...and if they really like the music...THEN, they are likely to buy the CD. Not before.

In short, regular radio exposure sells music. Given that it's so hard to get this exposure and there are so few open spots and so many bands competing for them, it should be no surprise that local music is not getting played on radio.

The days of cities and regions having a musical identity (think bluegrass of Appalachia, the soul of Motown, the blues of Chicago, the jazz of New Orleans) are gone. The only towns that can keep this alive are the tourist towns that have a 50 + year history of a certain type of music.

The lack of local music on stations is "corporatizing" our culture. Every city in this country now hears the same few songs. It's becoming harder and harder to keep our regional musics alive. Please make the changes necessary to correct this course.

Please.

Market forces are not working. If you don't want to break up/limit these media conglomerates (the best solution), you MUST require local programming on commercial radio to fix the problems I described.

The CONTENT of the broadcast should be local. If the CONTENT of the broadcast is about local news, events, and music, then it could be produced anyway. Ideally, it would also be produced locally as well.

Let the stations decide:

Music, news, local sporting events could all count. The stations should be

required to provide a mix of all three.

This should not be part of the law at all. The law should just be about programming.

Payola is alive, but becoming unnecessary. Major labels play select radio promoters who have exclusive access to commerical radio. They also provide computers, tickets, trips, etc. that the station can give away...this ensures that they major labels get their bands on the air.

However, because ClearChannel owns most of the commercial stations, these promoters are becoming less necessary. There is so little competition that the major labels now want to deal directly with ClearChannel, cutting out the expensive middle man. Eliminating these radio programmers will not increase the likelihood that local music will get played on commercial radio...it is, in fact, just an attempt by the labels to reduce cost for something that is no longer necessary.

In short, with the virtual monopoly of ClearChannel and the consolidation of major record labels, payola is becoming unnecessary.

Corporate ownership is now a much bigger issue than payola.

This is another horrible side-effect of the Clear-Channel monopoly. The real problem is the monopoly...voice-tracking is a symptom. Elminating voice tracking will not help solve the real issues that prevent local programming. If you eliminate it, Clear Channel will probably just hire a few more djs...they will not change their business practices.

National playlists eliminate local music from the commercial radio airwaves.

Stations should be required to play a certain percentage of local music and a certain percentage of local non-music content.

LPFM are great, but they need more wattage. They could, in fact, benefit the community...but they could never match the injustice created by the Clear Channel monopoly.

Thanks for allowing me the chance to respond to your work. I know you have a difficult job, and would greatly appreciate any efforts you can make to improve local programming.

Sincerely,
Brian Hartzog
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