

JUST FOR PROGRAMMERS

January 22, 2014

Three Things Radio Can Learn From a Great Songwriter

One of the most compelling, interesting and downright charming speakers at the 2013 Nielsen Audio Client Conference & Jacobs Media Summit last month had to be Claude Kelly. And while you've probably never heard of him you've certainly heard his music.

Kelly is a songwriter who has penned hit songs for some pretty big artists. Here's a partial list, see if you recognize a few of these names: Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Christina Aguilera, Bruno Mars, Britney Spears, Kelly Clarkson, Backstreet Boys, Kanye West, and Adam Lambert.

As you might imagine, hearing him talk about his creative process and how he works with big name stars was fascinating. It also yielded some interesting lessons for radio programmers:

- Content is Everywhere:** Asked where he gets his inspiration Kelly said he loves public places like airports where he can watch people's personal stories unfold. "You hear one-liners and they become songs." That's an excellent reminder for radio hosts who spend their entire day on the internet "prepping" their show. Yes, there is value in that but there even more rich content to be found in places where real life is going on.
- Creativity is Collaborative:** Too many hosts see people who try to provide suggestions or input as being critical or stepping on their creativity. Kelly believes in the exact opposite approach. "You don't make the best song by yourself in your own little world. It's helpful to have someone say it's good but here's how you could make it better." Hosts who want to do a great show should look for people they can use as a sounding board, and hopefully a collaborator, to hone their on-air material until it's the best it can possibly be.
- Watch Your Language:** Kelly says "writing great songs is just a matter of language." When he is working on a song for an artist he tries to understand how that person would say what he is trying to convey. That's a great test to apply to a station's promotional copy. Always try to say things the way your audience would say them. If you speak their language you'll have hits just like Kelly does when he speaks the language of the artist he is trying to write for.

It's amazing how similar the creative process Kelly goes through is to what hosts and Program Directors are doing at their stations every day. It's also a good reminder that there is a method to creating great content and taking time to analyze and refine the process you are using can be very beneficial.