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A Balance Of Rock And Talk

How WFBQ/Indianapolis keeps Bob & Tom fans from flipping off the classics

In many markets throughout the U.S. Classic Rock stations have reaped tremendous ratings dividends by placing a high-profile, chat-heavy ensemble program in morning drive. Sometimes the morning show takes on a life of its own, however, and becomes far more popular than any other element of the radio station.

In one such market, which shall remain anonymous, the Classic Rock station's morning show consistently beat its competitors with a four-book average of a 6.8 share. In middays the Classic Rocker fell to sixth, while in afternoons the station slumped to 10th. The 7pm-midnight shares were nothing short of abysmal — 75% of the station's morning listeners weren't tuning in.

That station has since added a talk-intensive program at night to help attract more listeners. But what of those Classic Rockers that wish to convert fans of their talk-intensive morning show into daylong listeners without moving toward more talk? WFBQ/Indianapolis PD Mike Thomas just might have the answer.

Morning Mastery

WFBQ just celebrated its 23rd year as Indianapolis' home for rock 'n' roll. Much of the station's overall success can be pinned on *The Bob & Tom Show*. Bob Kevoian and Tom Griswald joined WFBQ for mornings in 1983, after creating a buzz in Traverse City, MI. Over the next 10 years Bob & Tom became household names throughout Indianapolis. While always talk-heavy, for a while the duo did play music during their show, but they stopped almost seven years ago.

"In this market Bob & Tom are so popular, people just know that they don't play music," says Thomas. "Obviously, they have a lot of musical elements to the show. They play a lot of parody songs. But it's certainly not the music we'd regularly play on 'FBQ.'"

The lack of music in morning drive is of no concern to Thomas or the rest of Clear Channel's Indianapolis operation however. "We're well above the No. 2 competitor. The next-closest show in the 18-34



demo is on [Alternative] WRZX, which is our sister station, and in the 25-54 demo it's the Country station, WFMS," he says.

Both of those stations' morning shows offer a combination of music and talk, and there is presently no direct competitor in the music-free arena, aside from popular News/Talker WIBC. "The last time there was a direct competitor, a station decided to put on a Classic Rock format and put Howard Stern in morning drive," says Thomas. "It

failed, and needless to say that station is no longer around.

"With the numbers Bob & Tom get in this marketplace, I think it would be close to impossible to try to go after them as a competitor." Among men 18-49, for example, WFBQ dwarfs WFMS' second-place showing by a two-to-one margin: 18.8 to 9.5.

Part of Bob & Tom's show's success is its immense appeal to men. Recent guests have included Jethro Tull frontman Ian Anderson, Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi, Peter Frampton, *Defending the Caveman* star Rob Becker and several comedians. "Bob & Tom is definitely a male-leaning morning show, and WFBQ is a male-leaning radio station," Thomas says.

Indeed. One big promotion presently underway is afternoon host Jimmy "Mad Dog" Matis' 2001 NCT&A Tournament, in which listeners are asked to vote for their favorite pinup girl, each representing a different region of the U.S. Among those in the NCT&A East

Regional Semifinals is WFBQ midday host Laura Steele (seeded third), who, at press time, was losing to second-seeded supermodel Elle McPherson. Evening host Gunner's favorite CDs include Bruce Springsteen's *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, and his bio on the 'FBQ website states that his greatest achievements are his two

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beautiful baby girls — and slamming a fifth of Jim Beam during side one of AC/DC's *Back in Black*. Late-night host Ace Cosby loves *ALF* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and digs David Coverdale's *Into the Light* CD.

Clear Channel's Wall Of Men

Given Bob & Tom's huge cume, it's inevitable that some people might not stick around after the show. "There are some who may not like classic rock music at all," Thomas says. "The big challenge for me is to get to keep some of those listeners, and we're accomplishing that by heavily promoting our other dayparts during the morning show. We have a golden opportunity to approach the Indianapolis listening audience by doing that."

Should Bob & Tom's male listeners decide to drift somewhere else on the dial when their show is over, most of those listeners will

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still be fortifying Clear Channel/Indianapolis' "wall of men." "The thing that we at Clear Channel have going for us is that we dominate the men in this market," Thomas explains.

"While Emmis is based here and has a large cluster of radio stations, the only one appealing to men is WIBC. We have the upper end covered with WFBQ and our Sports station, WNDE, and the younger end is covered by WRZX."

WFBQ's heavy sports presence also helps lure male listeners. "We're the flagship for the [NFL] Colts, and 'FBQ is the station that carries Indiana basketball," Thomas says.

By buttressing its shifts throughout the day, WFBQ has seen very strong results. The station presently ranks third in middays and afternoons, behind WFMS and WIBC. At night WFBQ dips to sixth thanks to the typical rise in listening to teen-appealing radio stations.

A quick tour of WFBQ's website affirms Thomas' statement that the station is built for men: Twelve pictures of tennis goddess Anna Kournikova are easily accessible from the WFBQ homepage.

At the same time, though, the station is very active in the charity department. Earlier this month it raised approximately \$63,000 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society through the ninth annual Bob & Tom Radiothon. For an entire weekend the station took requests for donations with a "pay for play" program, and a Fender acoustic guitar autographed by John Mellencamp was auctioned off for \$7,500.

Success Spreads Via Syndication

Stations hoping to replicate WFBQ's success have, in the last six years, brought *The Bob & Tom Show* to their markets by way of syndication. When asked about the process behind taking the program national, Thomas invites Clear Channel/Indianapolis Market Manager Marty Bender into the conversation.

"We never really pursued it," Bender says of the duo's nationwide availability. "That attitude was never there in the beginning. The idea came to us. Geographically, Indianapolis is in the center of Indiana, and everything surrounds us. All of these other cities were always aware of what was going on in Indianapolis, including the morning shows. Someone just approached us one



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day and asked if they could run our show — all of it — for four hours. They even wanted to run the local news. It worked, and we started a statewide network that included Fort Wayne and Evansville."

WFBQ's then-owner, the Frank Wood-led Secret Communications, met with Bender to discuss Bob & Tom's success outside of Indianapolis. The program quickly became a regional offering, and then hit pay dirt as a national player when it went to No. 1 at KJFX/Fresno.

Today Bob & Tom are heard on 100 affiliates, and their show is distributed by Premiere Radio Networks. Some of the duo's largest affiliates include WOCT/Baltimore, KSHE/St. Louis and WOFX/Cincinnati. "We have a pretty good mid-to-large-market base, and we're committed to expansion in the top 20 markets," Bender says. "We have a top 30-market affiliate going on in a few weeks."

When asked about the key elements to Bob & Tom's success at WFBQ and at the many stations around the nation that air their show, Bender pauses for a long while. "Well ... it's a funny show," he finally says. "It just has one of those perfect combinations of personality that so rarely exists. It's not something that any consultant or programmer can put together. It's very rare."

"They both have this ability and willingness to attract other people to the show. These guys surround themselves with a pretty solid team of folks, and everyone has a good time for four hours. People have grown older with Bob & Tom. We've grown musically as a radio station, and Bob & Tom have been along for the ride."