

BOB MOODY

Dispensing Attitude, Advice & Ices: What'll Ya Have?

Regent Communications VP/Programming Bob Moody is celebrating his 40th year in broadcasting and was recently inducted into the Country Radio Hall of Fame. His on-air and programming background includes stints at legendary Top 40 outlets CKLW/Detroit and WAKY/Louisville, with Country stops including PD posts at KRMD/Shreveport and a decade at WPOC/Baltimore. He's also held national programming posts at Nationwide and McVay Media before joining Regent.

CA: What is your role as Regent's VP/Programming?

BM: I work with all our stations; all formats. For the Country stations, I serve as sort of a hands-on, in-house consultant for music and formats. I help the other formats with the other 85% of the business outside of music – marketing, promotions, ratings analysis, strategic planning, personnel issues, etc. We have consultants who assist with programming elements.

CA: Regent's Country outlets had pretty good fall books.

BM: We did OK. Eight out of the 11 were No. 1 either 12+ or 25-54, and, in most cases, both. All were the No. 1 Country station in their market.

CA: How do you work with the individual programmers at Regent's Country stations?

BM: I'm like an in-house consultant. Although, having been a consultant and a VP/Programming, I have observed that VPs stay at nicer hotels and people seem to pay a little more attention to an officer of a publicly held company than they do the consultant, who doesn't always seem to have a lot of authority.

CA: You're pretty famous for having some hard and fast programming tenets. Are they suggestions or mandates?

BM: It depends on how the station's doing. If the station is doing very well and is dominant in its market, I'm reluctant to make any fundamental changes to it.

But I started with many of our stations as a consultant 10 or 11 years ago, so most of them are following the beliefs that I have. I know everybody says every market is different, but look where our stations are: Lafayette, LA and St. Cloud, MN; Watertown, Albany, Buffalo

and Utica, NY and Ft. Collins, CO. We'll play Chris LeDoux songs in Ft. Collins that we'd never dream of playing in Albany. We'll play Cajun-flavored music in Lafayette we wouldn't play in St. Cloud. But in St. Cloud, Trisha Yearwood's "On A Bus To St. Cloud" is still in gold. We work very hard to customize not just the playlist, but the structure, the content and the personality of the radio station to the individual markets.

I'm also pretty well-known for the idea of programming to the heavy user — those who listen

100+ quarter hours per week — because they're going to be the first ones to burn on songs. If we were in bigger markets, I would have to rethink that because the PPM fundamentally changes a whole lot of things, including the fact that you have many fewer heavy users because people won't be able to draw a line from 8am to 5pm. With the PPM device, heavy users become less important. That's probably reality, but those [diarykeepers] that report 100+ QHs in a close race are going to be the determining factor. So I tend to move things through a little quicker. I have a "recurrent hold" category where most songs go after they go off the current list, to give them a little rest so that the people that have listened 25 hours a week or more can get a little break before it comes back in as a recurrent.

CA: What other things separate Regent Country stations from those of other companies?

BM: We are very reluctant to use voice tracking, other than having some on-air PDs voice

track an hour or two of their show. Because Regent's niche is in small and medium markets, we believe live and local is very important. Regent is also very serious about doing more than just paying lip service to the idea of community involvement and community service. For a company our size, we've won a disproportionate number of Crystal awards, Marconi awards, as well as ACM and CMA broadcast nominations.

CA: What are some of the other defining characteristics of a Regent Country station?

BM: Most of our stations have very high-profile personalities. That is not uncommon for most successful stations, but that's true of our stations beyond just the morning shows. We have some personalities who have been with their stations for a long time and are very well-known and established in their communities. I'm lucky to have some programmers and air personalities who could easily work in much larger markets, but who like where they live and who like working for Regent. We have a lot of people like that, which is very good for us.

And, the listener wouldn't notice this, but I think Regent has a reputation of being a really good place to work. I hear from people all the time who are willing to give up jobs in bigger markets to work for Regent because we have a sense of humor and we treat people right.

CA: What's the biggest challenge facing Country radio?

BM: We have to embrace new technology and take it as far as we can. Sometimes that's hard to accept for people who have been doing this as long as I have. But I'm on the Leadership Committee for the Interactive Initiative that Regent is sinking a lot of money into to help

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establish our online presence and streaming. We're not doing that because we think it's going to show up in Arbitron anytime soon, although we are getting the number of impressions that will be useful to an advertiser.

We're really looking forward to mobile WiMax — when people will have broadband in their car and be able to listen to any Internet radio station in the world. We want them to be accustomed to our radio stations when they're setting the presets on their Internet car radio. [Consultant] Holland Cooke said at our managers' meetings, "We have the big voices, we have the microphones — we know how to do this." To let some kid in his basement come and take that away from us is pretty stupid on our part.

CA: What are the most important skills for today's programmer to have?

BM: Leadership is important. It's also important to have someone who is organized and can juggle all of the different things we expect pro-

grammers to be able to do. We also want them to be passionate and creative. Combining the two is difficult. Creative people don't tend to be organized, and organized people don't tend to be creative. So you've got to find people who have a good mix of both. We've been very fortunate. You can tell from the ratings we have an outstanding group of programmers.

CA: How hands-on are you with music?

BM: I put out a list every week with 35 numbered songs and six to nine optional adds. Anybody can add any optional add instead of a light current at their discretion without having to clear it through me. If somebody wants to play a song that's not on the list, they just need to explain why they think that's a good idea. As long as they're playing everything they need to be and there's nothing funny going on, I'll usually go along with them. And it's my job to make sure there's nothing funny going on. We're very proud that we have four markets in New York State, and none of our call letters came up in any of Eliot Spitzer's evidence pages.

CA: What do you think of the state of Country music today?

BM: I'm pretty optimistic. I am encouraged by the quality of the music and especially the quality of the songwriting. I've always thought the songwriters were the unsung heroes of the Country format. We have the best songwriters in the world and they often don't get sufficient credit.

It bothers me, though, that more good music is getting lost today than in the past. Part of it has to do with radio consolidation, part with label consolidation and part with the slower charts.

The quality of the writing and the quality of

the artist is as good or better than it's ever been. But because the chart is moving so slowly, and the way the business side works now, it just breaks my heart to see some of these people who really deserve more success than they're getting.

CA: Any thoughts on why we can have high Country radio shares in a market but not sell any Country records?

BM: I'm not sufficiently versed in that, but that's not really my job. I know people in the record industry feel differently about it. I understand what they're saying and don't deny there's a certain synergy between the industries. But my job is not to sell records. My job is to get ratings. And, I've got eight No. 1 stations, so I guess it's working.

CA: What do you think of the radio and record relationship?

BM: The level of misunderstanding between the two industries is growing wider — and, it's getting worse. There's blame on both sides. There are people going into radio with a marketing and business background who just don't know and aren't interested in the way the industry works. There are also [record] people who don't have the faintest idea of how radio works. A better understanding on both sides would help everyone see how we could really work together instead of continually bumping heads.

CA: You were inducted into the CRB's Radio Hall of Fame in March. Have there been any interesting calls, emails or stories?

BM: Lots of interesting things have happened — like the guy who appeared at the end of the [induction] and asked when I worked at KOTN/Pine Bluff, AR for Buddy Deane. I looked at him and said, "About the same time the Uniques were playing at the Oakland Tavern, Joe." It was Joe Stampley, who used to play there.

And somebody was telling me the other day that some consultant was critical of the way I went about doing some things. I said to him, Well, you know, when you get right down to it, according to research, I guess I'm an idiot. But according to my right ring finger, I'm in the Hall of Fame. So, I'm going with my right ring finger. And if that doesn't work, I'll give you the one in the middle. **CAC**

