

# PAT PAXTON

## Leading Entercom's Wolf Pack

**E**ntercom Sr. VP/Programming Pat Paxton's radio career began in 1980 while he was still in college. Following PD stints in Sioux City, IA and La Crosse, WI, he joined Venture Communications as PD of WKEE/Huntington, WV, and eventually became the company's National PD. Next came Nationwide Communications, where Paxton programmed WONX/Orlando. He transferred to Houston, where he programmed KHMx and later was promoted to Nationwide's National PD. The late '90s found him with Guy Zapoleon's consultancy. It was there Paxton consulted a number of Entercom stations and got to know Entercom CEO David Field. "We were philosophically aligned as far as how radio should be done," says Paxton, who joined the company in April 1999. He was elevated to VP/Programming in December of that year and upped to Sr. VP in June 2003.

**CA:** What exactly is that philosophical alignment you have with Mr. Field?

**PP:** Focus on the product. Ultimately, if it's done properly, the business plan is in place, and you have support from the top, then you're going to succeed. Very rarely do you hear about a truly great radio station failing, having to change format or making major material shifts in what they do. This is where David and I are very much aligned. It's such a pleasure to work for him because he believes in great content. He supports all of our efforts – research, talent, everything – to make sure that we create great content for our listeners every day. We've found that when we do great content, generally the ratings follow, and generally the revenue follows that.

**What's your role as Entercom's Sr. VP/Programming?**

I work with our PDs and managers to make sure we maximize every opportunity we have in all our markets, whether that's working together to create the biggest cluster share; working with our market managers and our marketing directors to make sure we're getting the best ROI in every marketing dollar we spend; or whether it's taking a look at all the brands in the country and deciding, "OK, where do we really need to do research, and what kind of research do we really need to do?" My job is, basically, to go around asking questions – sometimes they're easy questions and sometimes they're hard. I make sure everybody's on the same page and has a really good strategic sense for what their brand's goal is and what their expected accomplishments are. From me all the way to the market manager, to the PD, to the people who work for the PD – I have to make sure the synergy is there, from top to bottom.

**You interact with the GMs and market managers as well?**

Absolutely. There are some markets where I interact more with the market managers than I do with the PD. In some markets we have very curious managers who like to ask a lot of questions and like to know. I applaud and encourage this because these are the people who really want to learn. Most GMs don't come from programming and don't know as much about it as they do about running a business and a sales department. Some market managers ask, "Why are we doing this?" Not in a negative way at all, just in a "I want to learn more about what we're doing on the programming side" way. Obviously, they're responsible for the business. So when we start talking about new hires, marketing dollars, research dollars – and I'm talking about significant dollars, not just anytime you throw \$1,000 at something – we work through that together.

**I ask the question because not all companies are the same when it comes to the relationship between programming and upper-programming management, and the GM and upper-company management.**

I find [the way we do it] extraordinarily beneficial. If I'm looking to visit a market, if the market manager or PD isn't going to be there, I don't go in because I consider that a waste of everybody's time. When we spend a day in a conference room discussing both the strategic and tactical goals of our brands and what we expect to accomplish, if the GM and the PD aren't on the same page and don't agree on the same path to get there, then we have nothing but trouble down the road. So if everybody can't attend, I just don't go until everybody can be there.

**You have a Director of Country programming in Mike Moore. Does Entercom have similar posts for the other formats?**

Not in the music formats. We do have people who oversee our Sports and spoken-word formats. Our music formats have calls that range from weekly to monthly, depending on what's going on in the format. We have different programmers rotating in and out of heading these calls in all the various formats, so it's not one person's burden to do that for life. We do this on a needs-based ideology. I felt that I was not up to speed enough in the Country world to be able to help our Country brands to the degree that I felt was appropriate. And I think Mike is a genius when it comes to this. He's a genius when it comes to radio, but obviously, he specializes in Country radio. Having him as my go-to Country guy has been extraordinarily beneficial for me and, I think, our brands as well. Without question, he's one of the best.

**How would you describe your working relationship?**

It's a very collaborative and a very respectful relationship. One of the keys that make it work is that Mike is not afraid to disagree or to tell me what he thinks. That's what I expect from him. And, given the respect I have for his opinion, I gotta know what he thinks or that position is useless.

**Entercom has an amazing array of formats. With your national overview and all these varied formats, what are you seeing and feeling about radio in general these days?** Radio has been pronounced dead by people who don't know what they're talking about. People in New York City who don't have a good feel for the importance of radio and the popularity of radio around the country like to write articles that are, unfortunately, widely read and widely believed – sometimes even

among people within our own industry – that the medium is dead and that the medium is suffering. Radio is certainly suffering from a financial point of view. But I find it funny that it's generally newspaper writers who like to bash radio, and newspapers are probably the most endangered medium out there. They would kill to only be down what we are in revenue instead of the 20-30% that they're down.

Anyway, as I look at our brands and markets, go to promotions in our markets and see our listeners and do the research, my sense is that this medium – and this is going to sound a little bit biased, because obviously I'm in the business and I believe in it – is as strong as it's ever been. If you believe in the People Meter and in what Arbitron is telling us, on average, 92-93% of all Americans 6+ listen to the radio every single week. That is an extraordinary number and something we should be extremely proud of. The anti-radio people will say, "Well, they don't spend as much time with you anymore." *Of course* they don't spend as much time with us. In a world where video gaming has become such a huge deal; where the Internet – and I'm not talking about Internet radio, I'm just talking about the Internet – has become such a huge deal with the social networking sites and, to a smaller degree, the music sites, where iPods and mp3 players have just over the few years become such a huge deal; with all the different options out there to spend your free time, *of course* they don't spend as much time [with radio] as they used to. But, they all still come to us. And they all still spend time with us. There are very few media that can make that claim.

**What are some of your core basic programming philosophies that apply to all formats?**

Something that I must do, and something our PDs and GMs must do, is hire great people. By great people, I mean people who make the difference. People who will affect the community, who will make people feel something, who will generate emotion among the listeners, who will make people laugh or cry or get mad or happy or whatever the emotion is. But make people *feel*. If we can create the right mix of people on our music stations with people's favorite music and generate that emotion and in our spoken-word formats – whether its News, Talk or Sports – if we can create the right information and make people feel something, then we're going to be successful. Not everybody can make people feel. There are some people who are really good at getting on the radio and telling me the time or the weather. But they don't make you feel anything. It's our jobs to find people that make a difference in people's lives. And if we do that, the listeners will come back and listenership as a whole will grow.

**How autonomous are Entercom's stations or clusters?**

Oh, they're very autonomous. I tell everybody who asks that question that I don't program radio stations. There are times when I miss programming radio stations, but it's not what I do. I've programmed radio stations all my life, and, for example, when I was at Nationwide, never once did Guy Zapoleon call me up and say, "Here's what you're going to do. Goodbye and have a nice day." We talked through all the issues, and at the end of the day he knew it was my radio station and that I would be held

accountable for its performance, and that I would do what I do. And that's what I do now. There are certainly times when I will disagree with PDs and will tell them that I disagree. But at the end of the day, they are held accountable for the results. And so, I would say 95% of the time I share my opinion and stay out their way. If there was ever a remote instance where I thought a decision was so bad it could cause material harm to our brand, I obviously couldn't let that happen. But that would really be a rare thing.

**How much experience have you had with Country?**

Nationwide had some Country stations, but **Bob Moody** was at WPOC (Baltimore) then and he was our Country guy. I didn't have to worry about [it], because Bob obviously knows everything Country and was on top of those stations. I was involved with programming and was on the air at a Country station in Sioux City, but I've had limited exposure to Country. We've had great success with our Country brands, and a lot of that has to do with Mike Moore's involvement and the great brand managers we have at those stations. I'm learning more and more and am getting to the point now where I feel somewhat comfortable at having conversations with our Country stations.

**When you were promoted to Entercom VP/Programming in December '99, the company's Country stations were WBEE/Rochester and WDAF-AM/Kansas City. Entercom later purchased Sinclair, getting Froggies WOGY/Memphis and**





**WGGY/Wilkes Barre, PA. In '03 the purchase of Fisher/Portland gave you KWJJ. After that, under your stewardship, 'DAF moved from AM to FM, you added Country stations in San Francisco, Seattle and Greensboro. And along the way, you flipped out of Country in Memphis and Madison. What's been the thought process behind the evolution of Country as a growing component of Entercom's strategy?**

The reason it's grown is because I've seen the power of the format. I've seen what the format can drive. I've learned what the format is all about, meaning I've learned that all the stereotypes that you hear about Country when you're not in the format are not necessarily true. I've learned that the Country audience is as mainstream as any format. I've learned by going to shows and seeing listeners that they could be a Top 40 audience at times. I've seen the success we're having selling these formats and the success the advertisers see when they advertise on these brands. Most important, I believe in Country.

But, like the rest of the formats, I believe in doing Country *only* if we do it right. I don't believe in putting a bunch of music

getting ourselves into. But we felt that, first of all, there was room for two Country radio stations in Seattle. And second, we felt if we did it differently and in a way that stood out, we could achieve some level of success. And that's what's happened. Obviously, KMPS continues to thrive, and we're doing well. As we thought, there's room for two Country radio stations in Seattle. Because the Wolf brands are different – they're not just Country radio stations, they really are lifestyle brands – I'm far more comfortable putting on a Wolf brand than I am just a typical radio station.

The same thing happened in Greensboro, where WTQR has been around for decades. We didn't go in there, saying, "Oh, we're going to knock 'em out of the format." We're not so cocky or ego-driven that we believe that. We *did* believe there was room for two Country stations. We did believe the Wolf (WPAW), in the permutation that we created and the brand in its entirety, is different from what was in Greensboro. And what's happened? 'TQR continues to do well; we're doing well. So it's just been one of those things where we have been able to differentiate ourselves from the competition by using the Wolf brand and

fan. I know there's a successful Country station in Boston, but people who are born and raised here, especially in South Boston, aren't necessarily the type of people you expect to become country fans, and she has now become one.

**How does Entercom view websites in terms of their importance to the overall success of the station?**

Absolutely critical. We need to be where our listeners are. Accessibility is a key word in our business today. We need to be accessible to our listeners wherever they are. We have to be on their computers. We have to make major strides towards getting on their cell phones, getting into the iTunes Application Store so we can get on their iPhones, offering time-shifted programming on our websites so if they didn't hear the morning show today, they can podcast and listen to it whenever they want. If we're not taking advantage of all the digital tools out there to make sure our listeners can be as exposed as they want to be to our products, when they want to be, we are putting ourselves at a huge disadvantage because everybody else is doing it.

the system. PPM is *the* system now, and I don't see anybody else challenging them anytime soon. It's the system we're going to have to live with. It's the system that will check us and grade us and drive a significant portion of our revenue. So, it's up to us an industry to work with Arbitron to make sure it is as accurate and reliable as humanly possible.

**Where is Entercom with HD radio, and where do you think the industry is with HD radio?**

We have at least one HD station in most markets we're in. HD Radio is gonna get there. When FM radio started off with the underground radio stations and AMs were dominating, I bet people were saying, "It's gonna take forever, it's never gonna happen. People are kidding themselves." The same things people are saying now. HD Radio offers extraordinary benefits that we need to do a better job of communicating to the consumer. Once we start getting the word out in a broader way that in many markets HD Radio offers the same types of choices that satellite radio does, only it doesn't cost anything once you buy a radio, we'll start to see HD Radio become a bigger force in a lot of places.

**What are your thoughts on the way the radio and music industries are operating in this post-Spitzer decision environment?**

It's a little different. Again, I'm not sitting in the day-to-day programming chair, and someone who is could probably answer this question better. But I think there's more accountability out there, making sure things are done legally. There are still some arduous requirements that are nuts – filling out a piece of paper for every promotional CD that comes in seems crazy to me. But if the Attorney General of New York wants to continue to receive the tons and tons of paper they get from us every quarter, that's fine.

But I disagree very strongly with the vast majority of the assertions that Elliott Spitzer was making. He was just dead wrong on most of what he was accusing our industry of. That said, anytime you come under scrutiny, you take a look at your systems and how you do things and you find better ways. In some cases, we're doing things a little bit better than we used to.

**Overall, it sounds like you're extremely bullish on the future of radio and that it will be able to compete with the new technologies.**

No question. Look at Internet radio, it's nothing. Honestly. I like Pandora; I use it from time to time. But as far as it being a real competitor of ours, come on – it's not. Will it ever be? Maybe. But that's years and years from happening. Is satellite radio a real competitor of ours? Not really. There are all these different options out there, but they're not really competitors of ours. I read the other day that the No. 1 iPod accessory that's sold is the radio adapter. People wonder why Apple doesn't put radios in the iPod. Why should they when everybody is running out and buying the adapter already?

I am bullish on radio and not afraid of any of the competitors. There is a place for them, and they have done a good job in finding their place. Will any of them be the death of radio? Absolutely not. Other than taking a few quarter-hours away from us, they really haven't hurt us at all.

The next challenge people are talking about is Internet radio. When the Internet gets into the car in Portland, don't you think they'll be listening to the Wolf via the Internet or their regular radio? I don't think they'll go to whatever the latest online Country station is. The more our personalities touch the listeners, the more our music is tailored for each individual market and the more shows we have with local news, sports, traffic and weather, the more advantage we have in keeping people. Will it be a challenge? Sure. But every time something new comes out, it's a challenge. But that's the new one now – the one everyone says, "Oh, that's going to kill radio." No it's not.

It'll be one more thing people will get to do, but we will still dominate the way we do now.

CAC



Paxton with Mike Moore

on and putting a bunch of generic people on the air who have nothing to contribute to the records. That's why I'm such a fan of the Wolf formats that we do because the Wolf is a virtual brand. You listen to these radio stations and there's no question what you're listening to. There's no question you will remember what you hear. Like it or not, you're going to remember what you hear because we *do* stand out from what every other format is doing in those markets. And the same thing goes for Froggy and WBEE. Whether we're called Wolf or not, these brands stand out because of the interactivity they have with the listeners, because of the upbeat, fun nature of everything that goes on, both musically and between the music; they're just real, real community-active brands that people don't forget.

**What was the internal discussion about adopting the Wolf brand for the Country stations Entercom either re-launched or launched?**

I continue to believe so much in the Wolf because it's different. In Seattle, for example, KMPS is obviously a great radio station, run by extremely smart people. So in putting on another Country station, a lot of people were looking at us sideways, wondering what we were doing and if we knew what we were

everything that goes with it. I'm not going to say it's easy by any stretch, but certainly it's more possible than in some other formats.

**What are your thoughts on San Francisco?**

I think the Wolf there is one of the best-sounding radio stations in the US, let alone one of the best Country stations. We're in this for the long haul. Great-sounding radio stations get great ratings sooner or later. Our ratings are good, not great, but we're making strides every day.

**Overall, I get the feeling you're really liking country.**

I do, I do. And, Mike has seen to it that I've gone to Nashville a couple of times and met some of the artists. I've always heard this, but now I know it's true, that country artists are more accessible than artists in any other format – and not just to me, but to the listeners and everybody. That, of course, plays a huge part in their success.

I've gone to a couple of awards shows, and I've sat with Joe Galante and his people. I've taken the time to get to know the people, the format and the music, and yeah, there's no question that I've become a fan. Even more impressive, though, is that my Boston born-and-bred wife has also now become a country

**Including streaming.**

Absolutely. Streaming is a given. The majority of people who use our websites go there to stream the radio station. But we must create other reasons for people to visit. We need to create podcasts. We need to have our personalities, who in many cases are local celebrities, blog every day. And not just blog about the latest Jessica Simpson record. They need to blog about what's going on in their lives. We need them blogging about, "Hey we just brought our new baby home today." Or "I just went and filled up my car and it was \$4.50 a gallon. This is crazy." We need them blogging about their lives so our listeners can see that these normal, regular people have the same struggles and challenges and joys in their lives that the listeners do. We must touch the listeners with every opportunity we have – through the radio station, the computer, the podcast, blogging and the cell phone.

**What are your thoughts on PPM?**

San Francisco is our first PPM market and we've only had one monthly and one weekly, so it's too early to judge. Our company is a big fan of electronic measurement. We believe in it. We think it's time, we think it's necessary. That said, and I think Arbitron would agree with this, there are kinks to be worked out of