

2009 TOP TEN LABELS

- 1
Capitol
17.4%
- 2
ARISTA NASHVILLE
11.3%
- 3
BNA RECORDS LABEL
8%
- 4
Mercury
A UNIVERSAL MUSIC COMPANY
7.2%
- 5
BIG MACHINE RECORDS
5.9%
- 6
MCA NASHVILLE
A UNIVERSAL MUSIC COMPANY
5.6%
- 7
BIGGER PICTURE
5.3%
- 8
CURB RECORDS
5.1%
- 9
LYRIC STREET RECORDS
5%
- 10
(tie)
WB RCA RECORDS LABEL NASHVILLE
4.6%

LABEL OF THE YEAR

After three years at No. 2, Capitol/Nashville's promotion staff hasn't simply cracked through the glass ceiling, they've exploded through to claim their second Label of the Year distinction in the 12-year Mediabase chart era. Having the top overall performer, Keith Urban, is the cornerstone. Urban is also the year's top male artist, followed by Dierks Bentley at No. 2 and Darius Rucker at No. 6. Lady Antebellum are the No. 3 duo or group. Add in Trace Adkins and Luke Bryan, and Capitol boasts five of the year's top 10 records and 15 of the top 100. In sum, the label earned an astounding 17.4% chart share, besting the second place label by more than six percentage points and setting a new Mediabase record. Country Aircheck sat down with Capitol President/CEO Mike Dungan and SVP/Promotion Steve Hodges to discuss the dominating performance.



CA: You've been building toward this, but it all came together this year, didn't it?

Mike Dungan: Well, it's definitely the year that Lady Antebellum and Darius Rucker were realized. We had high hopes for them the prior year, and we actually had music out there that was received pretty well. But this year, we definitely got the feeling that everything these two artists touched was gold, and it was. For Darius to have three No. 1 singles right out of the chute – we couldn't have ever predicted that as even a possibility under the best of circumstances. And Lady Antebellum were just everybody's darling.



Mike Dungan

You had a significant transition with SVP/Promotion Jimmy Harnen leaving May 1, but you didn't miss a beat.

MD: No, and it's probably the thing that I'm most proud of. I'm sure Steve is humbly proud of it, but won't want to bang his own drum. But we didn't miss a beat. You know, to the largest extent, this is a team that was put together jointly by Jimmy and Steve, so the transition wasn't as brutal or as stark as one might imagine. But I wondered how Steve would handle it. There are a lot of different personalities on this staff, let's put it that way.

Steve Hodges: It also helps make us successful.

MD: We are drawn to a diverse roster. One artist is dramatically different from the other. There's nobody on this roster that competes with anybody else on this roster. And in our promotion staff, we have the same kind of personalities. I remember when we hired [West Coast Regional Mike] Krinik [soon-to-be KBWF/San Francisco PD], there was concern about him being known as one of the wild guys from radio. Jimmy, Steve and I sat around one night and decided having "a" Krinik on the staff could be the best thing we could ever do. It's never bad to have one guy that you might occasionally have to bail out of jail. Everyone brings a different talent, a different special quality that makes them go. And everybody can learn from that. You get the organizers, and those who are disorganized can watch and learn from that. You get the sweet one, and those who are cranky and pushy will learn how to work with sweetness. You get the cranky one, and those who are sweet will learn how to be occasionally cranky. And you get the wild one, and I think it makes the staff better.

SH: They definitely feed off each other. Conference calls are fun. Five, six different ideas flying around become

one great one. Kudos to all of them, that they realize their importance on the staff. It's a team, there's no other way to go about it. We can't miss one of them, and they know that they can't miss one of us. It's 24/7.

What was your biggest triumph at radio this year?

SH: The wild card was probably Dierks' "Sideways" because we didn't have a whole lot of success at retail and people didn't really think it was a big hit.

It researched pretty well and sounded so great on the air that it just kind of took on a life of its own. We got to that No. 1 battle and won by a very few points and very small audience. But it was Saturday and Sunday night at 11:59pm watching real-time, going to bed with your fingers and toes crossed hoping that when you wake up at 5am you'll see the numbers. And we got the nod.

MD: There are two others that we were almost there on. We've always known Luke Bryan to be a star, and we kind of fumbled on our second single from the first record. This year he's got a No. 2 record. If the damn Lady Antebellum record would get out of the way, we would have a shot at No. 1. The other is Eric Church. We had enormous sales success without really a hit record last go-round. "Love Your Love The Most" not only worked, but worked really well for a lot of radio people.

SH: Eric had a show booked in Milwaukee that started out in an 800-seat club, and they sold it out. We moved it to a 1,800-seater and sold it out. [WMIL PD] Kerry Wolfe went to the show and we started getting texts about how great it was. He didn't get [Eric] early on, but now he does and will add every Eric Church record out-of-the-box, if not early.

MD: Kerry sent me a text message that said, "This is honestly Garth-like, in a different way. And the guy's on a damn stool, for God's sake. There's as much energy, electricity and interaction with the fans as when Garth was up there."

What were the disappointments?

MD: No question, Emily West. Just a massive, massive star. She's been on this label almost five years, which is torturous for any one artist to have to sit still for that long. We have invested a lot of emotional and personal sweat equity into this one, and so has she. One of these days we're going to break it. We know how tough it is to break females in general, and this one in particular really, really hurts.

How do your artists approach working with radio?

MD: Honestly, that's one of the things that makes our jobs so easy to come to. One hundred percent of our artists are good to work with. And we've had a few go the other way over the years. They come in different forms, from the openly gregarious Darius and Lady A to the shyness of Keith Urban to what appears to be the grumpiness of Trace Adkins. They're all really good-hearted, decent, committed, dedicated people. [Former Arista Nashville colleague] Tim DuBois used to say, "There's way too much talent to work with assholes."

SH: When we put together the first radio tour, Darius wanted to go to every station. That's 155 just to hit the reporters. He said, "Well, let's try." Keith Urban still goes to the CMA radio remotes. He knows and is still very appreciative. I can't name one artist on our roster who doesn't realize that radio plays a huge part in their success.

MD: Last year, we had that thing at Dierks' piece of land.

SH: He had a new album, but more than anything he wanted to thank the people that put him there.

MD: We had virtually nothing to do with that except helping him coordinate invites. He did it all. And I don't mean his staff. Dierks was out there that day on a 4x4 stringing lights; he literally did it all.

Passing 17% market share is pretty remarkable.

MD: Well, yeah, I can't say enough about Steve and [VP/Promotion] Shane [Allen] and the way they've run this whole thing. It hurt when Jimmy left. He was walking around the hall singing that "Where Are You Now" song all the time; it got to be pretty annoying after awhile.



What does this success say about Capitol's commitment to radio?

MD: I told the promotions staff that was here when I came in, "Look, I've done what you've done. I know how tough it is to take 'No.' And I know how many reasons there are not to play a record." We're very attuned to radio's needs. There are things that happen that don't even really upset me the way that they would a normal person. Because I understand the kind of pressure that radio guy's under. It's like, "Okay. We'll get him on another one tomorrow."

SH: We don't hold grudges and it's usually not the last record you're going to ask them to play.

MD: It's all about win-win. We don't hold grudges because it just tears you up inside. It takes too long and you beat yourself up when you do that. Although there are a few guys... **CAC**



The Yay Team: Capitol promotion staffers celebrate CMA night. Pictured (standing l-r) are Southwest rep John Trapane, Northeast regional Diane Lockner, Midwest rep Brent Jones, Manager Anisa Bowman, Southeast regional Angela Lange, VP Shane Allen, SVP Steve Hodges and West Coast rep Mike Krinik; (seated l-r) Promotion & Mktg. Analyst Allison Hardy and Dir./ National Syndication & Special Projects Matt Hargis.