

INSIDE RADIO®

Monday, February 16, 2009

“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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GENUINELY GREAT GUY GIVES A-Z INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

by Mike Kinoshian, Personality Editor

Epitomizing a trait synonymous with the sector of the business he's impacted as positively as any 20 others collectively, one of the most quintessential/consummate consultants ever led a nomadic existence.

Early-on speech patterns were pleasantly punctuated and reminiscent of what one would hear in his Nashville birthplace.

Subsequent stops followed in Houston, Stamford, CT and Fresno but UCLA alum (B.A. in Psychology) [Guy Zapoleon](#) proudly declares Los Angeles is his hometown.

Conversations with many others in the industry yield rehearsed sound bites.

Results with Zapoleon though are refreshingly different – well thought out statements, reflecting his immense programming acumen.

Add to that his impeccable character and unquestionable integrity and it's easy to understand why he resides among this industry's upper-echelon.

Drake Disciple

At 13, Zapoleon was getting interested in girls and also discovering “Cousin Brucie” (Morrow) on NYC powerhouse WABC. “He was a great one-on-one communicator,” remarks Zapoleon Media Strategies' Founder/President. “Especially if you were a teen, you felt [‘Cousin Brucie’] was your best friend. That started my passion for radio.”

Additionally, British Invasion artists made it effortless for Zapoleon to become enthralled with the medium; however when his family relocated to Los Angeles and he first heard the late Bill Drake-consulted “Boss Radio” on KHJ, “I felt like ten shots of adrenaline were being pumped into my veins. It certainly had radio's greatest air staff in history. KHJ [masterfully] created excitement through great personalities, promotions and production values including Drake as imaging voice. His music- and production-driven approach changed radio.”

Forward momentum defined the “Drake Format” and Zapoleon asserts, “Every aspect of a Drake station was perfection. KHJ's ‘boss jocks’ had frenetic energy and delivered liners which were rewritten to seven seconds but still got the message across. All radio that came before sounded ancient and sluggish in comparison.”

Time the KHJ “Maverick-A-Day” car contest winner (at age 17) devoted to high school studies was soundly trumped by his zeal for radio.

RKO National Music Director Betty Breneman gave Zapoleon his first radio shot in 1973 at Los Angeles' “K-Earth 101” (KRTH) where he'd do several tours of duty, eventually becoming Music Director with “brilliant” PD Bob Hamilton and GM Allan Chlowitz. “KRTH was a forerunner of today's Hot AC in era balance,” Zapoleon maintains. “It played currents and recurrences, along with oldies that went back 20 years.”

Eight years later (which included a 1977-1978 KRLA stint where he worked with Los Angeles radio icon Art Laboe), Zapoleon assumed KRQQ/Tucson's programming chair. “I'd hung out at KHJ [but realized] how much I didn't know about radio,” he admits. “It was 110 degrees when I got off the plane. Tumbleweeds blew across the runways. After Los Angeles' big city atmosphere, I wondered what I was doing but it was a great company. I got my PD stripes – even though I was green in radio basics.”

Uptown Girl Encounters

Ensuing radio opportunities proved to be rewarding in their own way.

Major market programming became reality at WBZZ/Pittsburgh, where he followed Steve Kingston and worked with Dan Vallie and Tex Meyer. “[Mickey Franko-managed] KZZP/Phoenix was my best radio education,” explains Zapoleon, who learned “elite programming skills” from Jon Coleman and Jerry Clifton. “Western Cities - and then Nationwide - stocked KZZP with the most amazing staff. Programming, sales and marketing departments all worked together to build strategies that turned KZZP into the legendary radio station it became. We had the best sales staff [imaginable], headed by Susan Karis and Mike Madigan. It featured great stars like Mark Kopelman and future GMs Paul Talbot and Chuck Duncan. We had double-digit 12+ ratings for two years and reached #1, beating then perennial #1 [Country] KNIX.”

Multi-format experience came Zapoleon's way when he was appointed National Program Director but he stresses Houston Hot AC “Mix” (KHMV) was his “finishing school” because he evolved into more of a station manager. “Empowered by VP/General Manager Clancy Woods, I handled overall station operations and developed marketing concepts. It really took me to another level

as a programmer and manager. KHMx was a station for people [who grew] up on rock music and wanted a foreground station that made them feel energized and involved in the community. Industry experts told us it would never work.”

Contests weren’t part of the “mix” but the Houston outlet did numerous charity events and Zapoleon opines it was the first “pop rock” Hot AC, foreshadowing the sound of numerous other subsequent Hot ACs. “[CBS Radio-owned] KHMx is now in the expert hands of VP/Programming and long time [Boston] Hot AC ‘Mix 98.5’ [WBMx] expert Greg Strassell. It will continue to flourish.”

Twenty years after breaking into the business as a major market Music Director in his beloved Los Angeles and programming high-profile CHRs KZZP, WBZZ and KRQQ; Hot AC KHMx; and being a National PD; Zapoleon was prepared for his next challenge – consultancy - and he concedes the early days were tough. “Steve Perun and I launched full-service, standards-based AC WEHM/Long Island. It matched the lifestyle of inhabitants like Barbra Streisand and co-owner Billy Joel and Christy Brinkley. A radio psychic on several of our stations [‘Samy’], told me I’d meet - or had met - a man named ‘Greenberg’ who’d be the key to my future in consulting. I’d just signed [Jacksonville’s] WAPE as a client and the owner was Evergreen Media’s Scott Ginsburg. Shortly thereafter, Scott involved me with all Evergreen stations.”

Business accelerated to such an extent Zapoleon hired Mark St John, Steve Davis, Pat Paxton and Lorrin Palagi as consulting partners.

Defending Sacred Trust

Gotham proved to be Zapoleon’s most memorable locale in his new venture. “Scott had me scope out the Big Apple for format opportunities,” he recalls. “Steve Rivers and I said a huge hole [existed] for Top 40 with a dance lean. There was no ‘feel good station’ [there then]. I argued with Scott to pay a New Jersey broadcaster \$150,000 to buy back the WKTU call letters so we could re-launch the dance brand everyone in New York City knew. The station went from worst-to-first in two books. I nearly killed myself working directly with 45 stations which took 18-hour days, seven days a week.”

Occasions to collaborate with groups in Australia and Paris surfaced and Zapoleon proclaims, “Life was crazy but good. [In the past 15 years], I’ve been blessed to have worked with the very best

Top 40 stations like KIIS/Los Angeles, Z100/New York [WHTZ]; Hot ACs like WBMx/Boston and KYSR/Los Angeles; and ACs [such as] WASH/Washington and KBIG/Los Angeles. I’m also very thankful I got a [1993] crash course from John Parikhal and Dave Charles before I launched my consultancy.”

Certain unwritten expectations go along with being a consultant. “When you work for many different companies, you’re trusted with trade secrets,” Zapoleon notes. “You have the fate of [many] people in your hands. You owe them thoughtfulness and kindness in dealing with and helping them. It really is an honor being a consultant and having that ‘sacred trust’ placed in my partners and me.”

Essentially performing VP/Programming duties for Evergreen and Chancellor, Zapoleon was immersed in strategies/setups of all their stations. “I’ve worked with the very best and brightest people in radio and virtually every great radio company,” he declares. “I’ve had great adventures with Pat, Jeff and Lorrin and especially my partners for over ten years, Steve Davis and Mark St John [who] put [everything they have] into helping Zapoleon Media Strategies clients win. No one is more knowledgeable or works harder. We have the best consultant team in the country and I’m very proud to be working with these very fine people. I wouldn’t have traded this experience for the world.”

Custom solutions have been Zapoleon’s trademark since he put his shingle out 15 years ago.

As such, he’s constantly vigilant in seeking ways to benefit his clients. One such avenue is “Generations,” an Oldies reinvention which debuted on Charlottesville, VA’s WXGN. “It’s a fresh look at era-based programming, incorporating the best music of the [1970s] along with evergreen [1960s] songs and compatible [early-1980s titles],” he explains. “It comes with a signature voice and custom jingle package, along with sweepers and a complete music library.”

Overdue Methodology

Some vilify it so much they’ve brought - or have threatened to bring - lawsuits against it. Others hail it. One thing’s certain – few in the industry are completely ambivalent about PPM. “Sampling systems differed in most PPM cities from Houston where Arbitron included house-to-house recruiting which yielded a more diversified sample,” Houston expert Zapoleon points out. “None of the samples done so far focused on including cell phone

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users [even though many] people - especially under age 30 – live in cell phone-only households. That will only increase with the economy the way it is.”

Moreover in certain situations, some refuse to carry the device. “If Arbitron either provided cell phones to respondents or allowed users to download applications to their existing cell phones, it would [help] overcome some users’ natural fear of using a new [gadget],” Zapoleon opines. “Thank God we’ve moved forward with PPM to finally get actual measurement of radio listening versus perceived listening – it’s 20 years overdue.”

On the flipside, he’s been an HD Radio critic. “At a time [when] radio was struggling to compete [against] other mediums, it made huge budget cuts and thousands of people lost their jobs,” Zapoleon remarks. “Broadcasters invested millions of dollars and demanded their programmers spend large amounts of time developing HD channels. It didn’t make sense. The internet was where future music and media consumers exist today. Radio had to reinvent itself for a new generation. HD [though] created a variety of niche formats. If radio becomes a brand used on the convergence device, many of these [formats] could be utilized. If that happens, the HD experiment was worthwhile.”

Harsh economic times face our industry which is under pressure to develop the most compelling product for if it doesn’t, Zapoleon succinctly states it won’t survive. “On the talent/programming side, you’ll see a rush toward network programming versus trying to be the very best local radio station one can be. Major companies and syndication firms are procuring the best on-air talent to broadcast locally and regionally.”

When that happens (and it’s already starting to occur) many talented personalities will be pushed out although Zapoleon predicts, “Those people will find smaller companies that will make direct connections with the local community through great local air talent, programming and promotions. Both approaches will contribute tremendously to betterment of the radio brand.”

Bud To Everyone

Future Christmas Days will, sadly, not be remembered by Zapoleon for joyfulness but rather as the anniversary (2008) of his father’s (Bud) death.

The President of two major Los Angeles retail clothing chains, Bud treated everyone with love and respect. “Dad mentored many future stars of the retail business and saw how much they loved [him] for helping them with their careers,” Guy proudly recounts. “He touched thousands of lives through his kindness. People always told me how special my dad was and what he meant to them. I’ve always tried to emulate [him]. My mom [Mickey] got me to believe to do what I loved. She’s an extraordinary, dynamic woman who worked with some of the most prominent leaders in the newspaper and magazine business.”

Highly-indicative of the type person he is, Zapoleon – who rarely discusses himself and is more comfortable lavishing praise on others – cites mentoring among his top priorities. “My father taught me to help others first,” Zapoleon emphasizes. “Seeing people

you mentored do well is its own reward and one of [life’s] best experiences. Working with great radio stations gives us the unique experience of being able to mentor young minds. Amazingly talented air talents and future programmers [at KZZP/Phoenix] including Kevin Weatherly, Todd Fisher, Bruce Kelly, Clarke Ingram, Michelle Santasouso, Doug [Sluggo] Roberts, Kevin [Ryder] & [Gene] Bean [Baxter] and Darcy Sanders taught me the joy of mentoring young radio minds.”

Especially for a person in Zapoleon’s position, time is a precious commodity but he somehow manufactured a chunk of it last year for a person he strongly believes in. “I was consumed with the presidential election,” he states. “I am - and have been - a huge Barack Obama fan. After what happened in 2000 and 2004, I had a sickening feeling about where the country was headed for eight years and knew it could be another close election. Obama’s amazing strategy and ground game aside, [the election] would’ve been [much] closer if those of us who believe in this special man didn’t go out and convince people he was the ‘only’ choice. [Still], it is going to be tough for him to fix everything that’s broken with America.”

Consuming pop culture from every conceivable source, Zapoleon tracks his UCLA Bruins basketball and football endeavors and enjoys watching “Desperate Housewives,” “ER,” “Lost” and “Madmen.”

Magnanimous Possibilities

At least for the immediate future, expect to see this uniquely-gifted talent continuing to work with companies to create radio brands. “I want to help broadcasters find ways to survive through building content that gains loyalty of cell phone and internet users,” Zapoleon comments. “While I love being involved in media, it’s a life-consuming career [so] I want to find more time to volunteer and focus on doing charitable work. Maybe I’ll find a way to do a combination of the two.”

One option is to own a radio group in his fiancée Cathy’s native Maine. “I can do good work in the community or create a media school or talent placement company, Zapoleon theorizes. “Maybe it’s not in radio at all – I might work for a food bank, helping the homeless. Only God knows where He wants me to be.”



WHO: Guy Zapoleon

WHAT: President/Founder

WHERE: Zapoleon Media Strategies

WHEN: Since 1993

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