

All Access:

10 Questions with Joel Habbeshaw

NAME: Joel Habbeshaw

TITLES: National Promotion

COMPANY: Kirtland Records

FORMATS: Everything

LOCATION: Los Angeles

BORN: Las Vegas

RAISED: Las Vegas

BRIEF CAREER SYNOPSIS: Started out booking punk bands in Vegas before joining the army (Tank Commander). When I got out, I started at KUNV (R&R college station back in the day). Joined Don Parker and John Griffen on the startup at KEDG/Las Vegas. After a few years I jumped sides to work at Maverick Records, Hollywood Records, Gold Circle and now Kirtland Records.

1) What made you want to get into the music business? Early mentors? First job?

Love of music drove my passion. I love to share music with everyone. Radio was a great way to reach a lot of people about great music.

2) Too many records, too few slots. What data seems to be most important to you when jockeying for an open slot on a radio station, and why? Ticket sales? Tour info? Prior success? Retail? Other stations?

That fully depends on what station you are talking to. Each station is different, and they look for different reasons why they need to add your record over another. Past history may work for one station, and who is on it might work for another station. It's about learning as much as you can about each station and creating a story for them.

3) It seems that set-up is more important now than ever. What do you do to inspire your staff for success in the field on a daily basis with the amount of material that recording companies are releasing in today's market place?

Staff? What staff? LOL. We recently hired Tom Morningstar out of Dallas, and he has been a big help. I hire some retainer indies, and that's pretty much the only staff I have. Set-up is important, but I also think follow-through is more critical. Our jobs are to get the airplay, but more importantly it's to keep the airplay and market around the airplay. Too many promotion people call till the add is done, and they soon disappear from the radio station. Major labels cut back on budgets after the whole payola scandal. Remember, payola is payola, and marketing is marketing.

4) Things are changing rapidly in our business. Were it up to you, what would you change in our "system" to give your bands a better shot?

Things have always changed and always will change. There is no doubt that consolidation has hurt creativity at both radio and the labels, but that bubble will eventually burst. I personally feel that radio is shooting itself in the foot by going more automated and not creating a new talent pool for the next generation. In this day and age you can get music from so many various locations, but radio gives you a lifestyle you cannot get from your iPod or anywhere else. We lose that, and we all lose.

5) Who do you consider the current tastemakers in the Rock world?

Anyone playing the Burden Brothers! LOL! I have been traveling a lot lately, and I have heard some amazing radio stations that have been winning and I have heard some blah stations that are losing. There are some great programmers who are doing it right, and it shows in the ratings.

6) It has become apparent that in this research-driven time, records are taking much longer to "test." How do you go about making sure that your record will be given a fair shot?

You live by research, you die by research. Your gut is the main thing you have to rely upon. If you research at 80-120 spins, you won't get a good read, even if you extrapolate the unfamiliar out, if you research at 200 spins and you get bad research, you just played a bad record 200 times to your audience.

7) Repetition breeds familiarity. How does your label increase exposure of your artists outside of traditional radio promotion?

We have been focusing around radio on a micro-marketing approach: print ads, local and regional press, time buys, price and positioning at retail, and bringing the band through the market. The label did this on the last Burden Brothers record, and 80% of our sales on the last album came from airplay markets.

8) Every promotion person has a record close to their heart that for one reason or another never broke through -- "The One That Got Away." What is your "One That Got Away," and what did you learn from that record?

That would have to be a band from Vegas called Magna-Fi. I brought them to Gold Circle, and the label folded the first week of adds. Pretty sad.

9) What are the most important tools/resources you use to stay on top of the rock formats' growth and constant daily changes?

Mediabase, the telephone, email and an airplane ticket!

10) The lost art of Artist Development. What do you do to ensure your artist is building a career as opposed to just breaking a song? And does it even matter anymore?

One good song on a shitty album is just that. A&R needs to create some better material for the long run. I don't look at an artist as one song; it's about building a long-term commitment with the station and the artist. Once you get the airplay, the real job starts.

Bonus Questions:

1) What is the strangest record you ever worked, and what ended up happening to the band?

Big Kenny's "Candy Colored Glasses." He went on to form Big & Rich. The strangest record had to be Jesse Camp on Hollywood Records. Man, I still have that air report; still makes me laugh.

2) Are you finding that today's "baby" bands are getting a fair shot at radio, and more importantly are they being given the airplay they need to break through to the masses and be recognized?

I would say that it would be more about baby labels. There are so many out there banging away, but there are only five indie labels that have more than 50 spins on an artist at Active Rock radio.