



Radio dials away from 'oldies' listeners

Only option for golden oldies fans? Satellite radio

By Anne Thompson

Correspondent

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NEW YORK — Long before the digital age, there was the age of vinyl and the music that defined the baby boomers: The Beatles, the Supremes, the Beach Boys.

They've been the bread and butter of oldies stations that for decades could be found on an FM dial almost anywhere. But today the oldies station seems to be going the way of the Nehru jacket and beehive hairdo.

"Over the last couple of years, you've seen stations wandering away from the '50s and '60s oldies format at the rate of one or two a month," says Sean Ross, vice president of music and programming at Edison Media Research.

The latest casualty is Bruce Morrow, New York's legendary DJ known as "Cousin Brucie." This month, his radio home, WCBS-FM — a perennial top 10 station — switched formats, ditching what Brucie likes to call the "greatest hits" for the "Jack" format; songs from the '70s to '90s played like an iPod on shuffle, ditching Brucie and what he says is a lucrative audience.

"They've decided if you're 43 years old, you're ready for preburial," says Morrow. "A 50-year-old person today, a 60-year-old person today, is extremely productive and has tremendous expendable income. So what about all those people?"

They are victims of radio economics and their age.

"Madison Avenue and the advertising agencies and their clients are looking for younger demographics today and that's what we're seeing, and that's the reason for the change," says Chad Brown, vice president and general manager of WCBS-FM.

In fact, today, 20 percent of the top 100 markets don't have an oldies station. But satellite radio is jumping in to fill the void.

Next month, Cousin Brucie will join Sirius Radio's growing stable of stars. Fans will have to buy the service to hear his two shows a week, playing the music he loves.

"I'm going to play music now that they haven't heard in years," says Morrow, "because I'm not stuck with 280 records anymore."

The promise of freedom and a wide-open playlist, plus a new technology, are ready to give older listeners what they want: R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

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