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Drilling Down

All Christmas, at Least Part of the Time

By ALEX MINDLIN

Every year, radio analysts predict a plateau in the number of stations that make a seasonal switch to round-the-clock Christmas music. And every year, they are wrong: the Christmas bandwagon has only been getting fuller.

One of the first stations to go temporarily all-Christmas was KESZ, in Phoenix, which adopted the format in 1995. "Everybody in the industry thought it was the craziest thing in the world to do, until the ratings came out," said Kevin Gossett, KESZ's program director.

Since 1995, the switch has begun ever earlier, often starting in the second week of November at some stations. "Program directors have to go earlier and earlier to keep the competitive advantage," said Sean Ross, vice president of music and programming for Edison Media Research.

The all-Christmas format is especially popular among women, who make up a majority of listeners of the adult contemporary stations that employ it. Program directors, who tend to be men, often grumble about the format switch, Mr. Ross said. "It's one of the times of year when you notice that a format targeted toward women is often programmed by guys, who don't get Christmas like the audience does."
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