



McVAY MEDIA

2008

CHR CHEATSHEET

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This document is to be your 2008 cheat sheet for the Contemporary Hit Radio format, known as CHR. Use this as a guide if you're a station Owner or GM to make sure your stations are properly positioned and doing what they should be doing. If you're a PD, use it as a review or checklist to make sure you're on track. If you're an air talent, learn.

Around the USA, CHR music is the soundtrack of the youthful audience, reaching primarily the 18-34 demographic, but spilling evenly over on both sides into the teens, and 35+ audience. And notice that I said, "youthful audience". and not only youth. **You are as young as you feel.** I know lots of people who love the format and listen at higher levels, and are on the Far North side of 35!

The benefits of the CHR format are:

1. Positive energy through the music and presentation that set the station apart from the crowd
2. Quantity and quality of music
3. A confident, upbeat, magnetic on air sound
4. Strong morning show that is compelling and creates day to day tune in with that "I wonder what they're going to do this morning" feel.
5. High on-going promotional level



CHR is definitely an exciting format, playing the latest hit music and generally being “today” oriented. Let’s review what makes it so, using the McVay Media “pillar” concepts of music (and imaging), information, personality, and promotion. Within the general CHR format, there are two variations... Pop CHR, and Rhythmic CHR. These are the two variations that you’ll see in the chart section of Radio trade magazines.

Musically, the key factor in any CHR station is that each format is “today” oriented, with from 80-90% current and recurrent music from 2008 and 2007. The other 10-20% goes to Gold. CHR fans prefer the latest song titles.

Within the Pop CHR format, there are actually two styles ... regular Pop CHR and Adult CHR. The differences between the two are that the regular CHR format seeks a format with an average age of 26-28, while Adult CHR is after the 29-31 year old listener. The Adult CHR format goes a little deeper into Gold and even special daytime current music. Plus, specific day parting of titles make a difference between the two styles. These elements make the air sound in Adult CHR appropriate to reach a slightly older demo. The most frequently played artists in the Adult CHR and CHR formats up to this point in 2008 are: Rihanna, Justin Timberlake, Natasha Bedingfield, Mariah Carey, Daughtry, Usher, Chris Brown, Fergie, Lifehouse, and Nickelback.

Rhythmic CHR is a music format variation that plays a mix of dance, hip hop, R&B, and Pop song hits. Like it’s “cousin” Pop CHR, this is a very current driven format with only a few gold pieces selected. The most frequently played artists in the Rhythmic CHR format so far in 2008 are Chris Brown, Usher, Lil Wayne, Rihanna, Alicia Keys, Mariah Carey, and Kanye West.



Regardless of whether you are running Pop or Rhythmic CHR, know that the music is the STAR.

Music on CHR stations is generally dayparted, with only the biggest mass appeal hits being played in the morning and into the midday, then rolling into a more youthful approach in afternoons, and only songs played during the evening that appeal to the younger segment of your audience as that's the available audience.

Be sure that you are truly playing the hit songs in your market. You need to have programming people within your operation that are in sync with your audience lifestyle or get professional help from an outside expert (consultant), who understands how to get that information. Run research panels in your market to make sure you are on track. In today's light speed society, the 18-34 crowd is highly changeable in their moods and attitudes.

With CHR, imaging is one of the most important items. It's important that a CHR station have an attitude; one that truly reflects the feelings and lifestyle values of the target that you're going after. The station voice should be personable and adult sounding, yet still forefront. In most cases, it's better to hire an external voice for your station imaging. You want a pro as they have an understanding of what you need and this budgeting should be looked at as investment considering how much time they actually spend on your airwaves.

For the CHR format, station production should generally be **upbeat and exciting**. There should be more importance placed on station benefits in produced sweepers and live position pieces.



Information given within the context of the CHR format falls into three categories: content between the songs, local and PSA local material, and news.

I feel that within contemporary formats like CHR, the on air sound should be looked at as a big, solid brick wall. The bricks are the music but the mortar in between the bricks is what the talent bring to the station in content, and the mortar hold the bricks together. So the content of the station, what goes between the music, is exceptionally important.

A big part of the on air content from talent is show prep. Of the top-rated shows across our country, all of the top shows do prep in advance. And I'm talking about more than just glancing quickly at the newspaper or checking the latest gossip info on the computer screen while in the studio. There should be a management driven process in place in which the air talents are updated on what's going on in your market, and what's relevant to your target audience before they hit the airwaves.

Highlighting the importance of this, we at McVay Media offer daily show prep to our clients.

Information is an important part of what happens on a today based CHR. Beyond the music, what happens in the morning and then to the rest of the day is very different. The morning on a CHR is when you have in-depth detail and content, but the rest of the day the information comes from the talent when they air local PSA material, re-written as NSGO (Neat Stuff Going On), along with normal service elements.



Most CHR radio stations do not run a heavy quotient of actual hard news, but I feel that even within the CHR format, good relatable information targeted toward your specific audience is very important. You want to be the information source for your demo, not giving them too much, but telling them what they need to make it through the day.

Personality-wise, CHR radio does it backwards. That is, evenings are the first shift to show significant movement in this format and generally should be at the top of the ladder, followed by afternoon drive, then mornings, and last comes middays. The younger audience is more available after 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Mornings are a challenge (just like any other format) to build and continually grow, and middays are pretty mild.

It's important to remember that CHR radio stations are built primarily on cume, versus TSL.

The turnover of a normal CHR radio station is higher as listeners come and go and song rotations match this quicker turn over. I am a regular listener to CHR radio and enjoy hearing my favorite songs frequently.

Morning drive in this format features higher level talent. All of the service basics still need to be there in abundance, but there needs to be a more lifestyle oriented approach from the talent. Talk about what the 18-to 34 crowd is talking about. Morning shows should be locally aimed, topical, and relatable, and there needs to be total awareness of what's relevant to the target audience. The economy is now the #1 topic in all formats in radio, and it's no different to the 18-34-year-old crowd. They care about their job possibilities, and holding onto the positions that they have.



Outside of AM Drive, the CHR talent presentation should be natural and real, enthusiastic and bright, personable, topical and entertaining, and not condescending. Talent should work toward providing a “show” for their listeners. Evenings may be a little more upbeat and involved, working with listeners on the phone. Passion and excitement here is to be encouraged, while screaming is not.

Promotionally, CHR is not a shy format and you have to stay out being active and alive in the public eye. When kicking a CHR off, do everything you can, screaming from the rooftops that you’re here. A mature CHR station still needs to repeat the kickoff lessons.

Remember the 18-34 target with every promotion you run. If it doesn’t fit the target, you should not do the promotion. I am a believer in having a higher promotional profile year round in this format, but watch out for too many contests and “stuff” on the air at one time, which equal clutter. Know that you have promised your listeners certain things by being a CHR. Do not disappoint their expectations or you will see listener attrition. Look to do fewer contests and make them fun, entertaining, and relevant to the audience.

So there is your CHR cheat sheet. **Above all, have FUN with this format!**

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King consults all forms of contemporary radio, including CHR, Hot AC, Mainstream AC and Oldies. He is a 37-year broadcaster and has been with the company since 1990. A 20-year broadcaster prior to joining the consultancy, King has programmed and been on the air in major / large markets including Miami, Pittsburgh, Nashville, and Indianapolis, and was General Manager of a multi-station operation in Wichita, Kansas.