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A Journey Into The Future!

By Nicole Sandler

Déjà vu is an odd, unsettling, sensation. But I experienced it in a big way when it was announced that Entravision was buying Channel 103.1 and turning it Spanish. This seems to be an epidemic in Los Angeles, where just four years ago, my former Adult Rock home, KSCA, was also sold and went Spanish.

The sick feeling in my stomach actually started much earlier when, in October of 1999, I first heard that Clear Channel and AMFM were going to merge. A little bit of math showed that the resulting company would own 12 signals in the Los Angeles market, and obviously would have to divest a few. General logic says the first to go would be the one that counts as two. Channel 103.1 is actually two stations; KACD Santa Monica and KBCD Newport Beach. And even with the combined transmitters, it still doesn't have total market coverage. It didn't take a brain surgeon to figure out that we'd go on the block.

Of course, we all hoped that whoever bought us would be interested in keeping the station intact, but that wasn't going to happen. Once the word came down that the buyer was Entravision (and solidified the thinking amongst listeners that I was cursed), we began hearing rumors of interest in the intellectual property. Perhaps someone would buy our programming, and move us to another frequency. But that wasn't in the cards, either.

Back in 1996, when KSCA went off the air, I had discussions with a few different entities about the possibility of putting a similar station on the Internet. But we all knew it was way too early for that.

However, it's now the year 2000. Technology has advanced exponentially. Broadband is a reality! In 1996, most of us who were online were there courtesy of 14.4 dial-up connections, but today many of us are speeding along the superhighway on very high-speed DSL or cable connections. And most offices are connected with T1 lines or LANs.

So now, four years later, I think the time has arrived, and apparently so do some other forward-thinking folks in the Clear Channel fold. When it became apparent we'd be spun off, I fired off a quick E-mail to one of the Clear Channel honchos, suggesting that, because our overhead and operating expenses were so low and we offered such unique programming, they consider keeping us as an Internet-only station. Whether or not this had any influence on our eventual fate, I have no idea. I do know that Clear Channel has been assembling a new division, Clear Channel Web Services Group. Realizing that the Internet is a big part of our future, this company is leading the pack in helping its stations take advantage of all this new medium has to offer.

Clear Channel Web Services has hired various content managers to help our stations in different formats come up with unique and compelling content. John Martin, President of CCWS, had numerous discussions with our GM, Roy Laughlin,

and our GSM (now VP/Sales, Clear Channel Los Angeles), Charlie Rahilly, and they collectively decided the idea was worth pursuing.

So, we took it to the audience. We put a petition on the Web site, and asked our listeners to show their support for keeping World Class Rock alive by moving it to the Internet. Initial response was huge—so big, in fact, that in the first hour, we blew out the server! Not necessarily a good thing when you're planning on serving up unlimited streams, but a good indicator that the listeners were there with us—and that we seriously needed to upgrade our servers!

We pulled down our existing Web site, knowing that if we were going to do this right, we'd need to start from scratch—building everything new, state of the art, and better than it's been done before. We also knew that our streaming capacity was severely limited, and the last thing we wanted was someone to try to listen and get a message telling them that the servers were full.

After a few weeks of number crunching, conference calls and I'm sure lots of discussions that I wasn't privy to, we finally got the go-ahead. We were going to be making history!



Nicole Sandler with Don Henley

Rather than just disappearing and becoming part of the radio history of Southern California, Channel 103.1 would become the first radio station to seamlessly move off its FM frequency onto a new existence on the Internet. It also marks the first time that a major radio owner has made the leap into Internet-only territory.

Obviously, we have our jobs cut out for us, as we're blazing new territory. We really had no concerted PR effort, but once we announced our plans, the press started calling. Beginning with a front-page story in the *Sunday Washington Post* on July 16, which declared "this could be a seminal moment in broadcasting history," we've been written about in *Variety*, the *Chicago Tribune* and countless other publications. Both CNN and ABC's "World News Tonight" check in consistently for any news on our final over-the-air date, as they both plan on being here to cover the moment we switch from terrestrial to cyberspace.

Our main goals on the technical side are to make listening to us over the Internet as easy as turning on your radio, and for the sound quality to be as good as, or better than, anything else streaming online. (With our lousy signal, it wasn't hard to improve on reception!)

Our main page is designed to be simple to understand and navigate. We offer six easy ways to listen, including a new desktop player that puts a *WorldClassRock.com* icon on your desktop and allows you to open our player and start listening without having to open an Internet browser!

There are so many people involved in this project that I fear I won't give credit to enough of them in this piece. But we have input and participation from all corners of Clear Channel and AMFMI. This is a huge team effort, as we not only build this new existence for our radio station, but also set standards for the online future within the company.

Early strategic partners include iBeam, who provide our unlimited streaming, and Spot Magic, who developed our desktop player. The various technologies available to make our station work better have to be tested, and partnerships developed. Chris Peaslee, Director Of Business Development for Clear Channel Los Angeles, is blazing a trail through the forest of programs and platforms and technologies available, trying to find the ones that'll best help us meet our goals. He's also charged with the task of syndicating our content, increasing traffic to our site and monetizing it all!

In addition to the technological concerns, the other main component is, of course, the programming! To get listeners to go

to the trouble of listening online, we have to give them something they can't get over the air. With our format, that really isn't a problem. But we realize it is the really passionate P1s—those listeners who are freaking out that they're once again losing *their* radio station in Los Angeles—who are willing to do whatever it takes to be able to continue listening to us. I think we really have to superserve the core, and give them a reason to upgrade their computers and trade in their dial-up ISP for DSL. So, the library has been expanded a bit, and more new music is being played. But the basic format remains in place.

Our name was an issue, too. Channel 103.1 soon won't mean anything, and would prove to be even more confusing. Our main positioning statement, and best description of our music, has always been "World Class Rock," so, imagine how thrilled we were when we learned that John Martin had the forethought to register *WorldClassRock.com*. He gave it to us, and we have our new name. The *channel1031.com* URL will always be active, and point to *WorldClassRock.com*, for those who have it bookmarked.

Drive time is now not an issue. The majority of our listening will be in-office and at home. So, airshifts will change a bit. Andy Chanley will continue doing a morning show, but he'll be on from 6am-noon. Instead of afternoon drive, my shift will run from noon-6pm. Our Music Director, Rolee Rios will handle 6pm-midnight and Terry Gladstone will be on from midnight-6am. Thanks to the technology of Prophet, the 6am-midnight shifts will be a combination of live and voice-tracks, giving us a lot of flexibility, and the overnights will be voice tracked. We have to keep in mind that, although we're on the West Coast, we have listeners world wide, and what's the middle of the night here is lunchtime somewhere else!

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We're still running very lean, so all of us also handle a weekend shift, and various part-timers including Mike Morrison also pull shifts. In addition, Chris Carter has brought his "Chris Carter Mess," with lots of new music and imports, to Sunday nights.

Since Channel 103.1 came into existence in October of 1998, we've been based in our Santa Monica studios, with a small staff. All the administrative and sales staff was in Burbank, shared with sister-stations KIIS and XTRA sports. This arrangement continues. Our small Santa Monica staff will all remain with us: Production Director Steve Cook, Morning Show Producer/Studio C Engineer Mike "Onion" Wright, Engineer Dana Puopolo, Webmaster Tricia Kennedy and Office Manager/one-woman promotion department Anita Dominguez.

The relationships we've developed over the years with LA venues and the live-music scene will flourish in our new world as we take them to the next level. We've already begun a series of "Studio C On The Road" sessions with the House Of Blues, which has amazing Webcast facilities. We had our first "launch party" with the Indigo Girls. Eighty listeners were invited for food, drink and a post-soundcheck session, including a brief interview and three songs, which were Webcast, live for anyone, anywhere in the world, to watch! We followed this the next week with a similar event with Steve Earle, and we've just begun a live broadcast series from one of our city's best small clubs, Largo, with a private Aimee Mann show. Live broadcasts will be a major component as we bring LA's live music to the rest of the world. In addition, Studio C will get a face-lift, with an equipment upgrade and streaming video.

Promotionally, we will remain as active as we've always been; though obviously some adjustments will be made. With Clear Channel's recent acquisition of SFX, we hope to be able to do ticket giveaways based on current tours rather than individual shows. So, for example, the winner would pick which city they wanted to see Sting in, rather than winning tickets to a show at the Greek Theater in Los Angeles.

We're also actively promoting the technology that'll make listening as easy as possible. We're currently giving away a Kima a day! Kima is a 2-piece unit that attaches to your PC and plugs into your stereo's auxiliary input, and brings *WorldClassRock.com* through your stereo at 88.3 FM!

Clear Channel has given us the 850 AM frequency to simulcast our programming for a variety of reasons. It'll help the sales department by keeping us listed in Arbitron, and will enable us to retain reporting status to the various trades that monitor airplay, while also helping us navigate the murky waters of licensing when it comes to Internet radio.

On the sales front, we truly are entering uncharted waters. But we have one of the best sales departments in the industry. The KIIS-FM sales team has always sold Channel 103.1, and they'll continue to sell us. Rates will be cut to



**Sandler with XTC members
Colin Moulding (left) and Andy Partridge**

So here I sit on a Sunday afternoon, giving you the stream-of-consciousness thumbnail sketch of *WorldClassRock.com* today, as we await word on the date of our final over-the-air broadcast and continue to write the rules as we go along. It's a bit scary and incredibly exciting!

I keep thinking about how it must have been 35 years ago, when this new technology known as FM radio was developing. It was that weird new thing—you couldn't get it in your car or on your transistor radio. Radio professionals who left their high-profile, well-paying jobs to move to FM were thought to be nuts.

I can't help but believe we're on the cusp of the next era of broadcasting. If I could have one wish come true right now, it would be that wireless technology would keep developing as rapidly as it's been, and that in-car listening will come quickly. Once that happens, I think there will be no looking back.

So, here's where the déjà vu ends. The last time the radio station I loved was going Spanish, I, along with thousands of listeners, mourned its loss. This time, I'm energized and very excited about what's to come. I spend an inordinate amount of time these days answering E-mails from listeners who are also thrilled that they're not losing us again. Many of them are writing asking for help in this new way of listening; many others are celebrating our newfound life. And I find myself finishing each response by thanking them for joining us on our journey into the future!

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www.worldclassrock.com!**

bargain levels in the beginning, and early indications are very good that many of our current advertisers will continue with us. Without the overhead of a transmitter, our operating expenses are considerably lower, and therefore the budgets we have to meet to be successful are lower as well. Those who understand the money side much better than I, feel this will work.

log on today!