



Grassroots

107.8 radio jackie

INTERVIEW WITH TONY COLLIS, STATION DIRECTOR

AIRDATE: 19th October 2003

BROADCAST AREA: South West London

NUMBER OF STAFF: Approx. 33

WHAT'S THE HISTORY OF RADIO JACKIE?

Radio Jackie evolved in 1969 after the offshore stations closed down, and it was named after Jackie Kennedy. Throughout the 1970s it operated on a one-day and Bank Holiday basis, and proved exceedingly popular, basically because there was no competition. In the early 1970s a recording of a Radio Jackie show was played in the House of Commons as an example of local radio, or commercial radio, before it actually came about. Then there were moves to try and legalise it by Archie Hamilton MP, who tried to bring about a Private Members Bill in the late 1970s. So Radio Jackie has a legacy of pioneering roots. In the early 1980s it eventually went 24 hours a day and was run by a committee that voted itself out and me in to run it as a business. At that point it wasn't a business though - it was a crusade to bring about small business radio and have some form of licensing for what Radio Jackie represented: smaller coverage, local and low cost radio; because radio needn't cost a fortune. The station was forced to close in February 1985, and then in 1996 a new FM licence for 107.8 was advertised. The licence was awarded to Thames Radio, but in February 2003 we re-formed Radio Jackie's original management team to purchase the station back for £1, and we relaunched on 19th October 2003.

HOW MUCH WORK WAS INVOLVED IN RE-BRANDING THE STATION?

There was an awful lot because when I took it over in March 2003 there was no real local content. It was following a music format that would have fitted a regional or national station very well, but wasn't targeting a locality. Re-programming the computer to put together the music format that we have today, took a lot longer than I had envisaged, and Radio Jackie wasn't going to come about until we had that just right.

HOW DIFFERENT IS RADIO JACKIE'S MUSIC NOW?

It's doing a similar thing today as it was before - covering a broad range with a catch-all format of popular, upbeat, radio music.

HOW DO THE LISTENERS OF TODAY DIFFER TO THE LISTENERS OF THE OLD RADIO JACKIE?

I don't think they do. We have an extremely broad age range, with exceedingly young listeners and very much older, more mature listeners. We're hitting the full range of local people.

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAMMING REFLECT THE AREA?

We carry news on the hour, a high proportion of which is local news, and if there's a national news item that has any local content, we'll highlight that. Plus, throughout the hour there'll be inserts of local information - though not to the parish pumps stage - to focus on, and relate to, the area that we're broadcasting to. More importantly, the advertising is solely locally-orientated. So if we have a national advertiser such as Sainsbury's, the advertising will focus on a local store that people can relate to.

HOW INTERACTIVE IS THE STATION?

It's exceedingly interactive. We have all the local MPs and councillors coming in whenever they wish. On our re-launch, mayors attended from all the surrounding areas, including Sutton, Spelthorne, Kingston and Wimbledon. We didn't miss a beat. And our website is getting a phenomenal number of hits.

HOW DO YOU SET YOURSELF APART FROM THE COMPETITION?

Again it comes down to being community-focused. We won't take advertising that the regional stations are taking unless it focuses on our area. We want to stand out as being different, so you won't hear Coca Cola on Radio Jackie unless they're giving it away in Tolworth Broadway.

WHICH FAMILIAR VOICES HAVE YOU BROUGHT BACK AS PRESENTERS?

Dave Owen is heading up music and doing drivetime. We also have Roger Allen - who dates back to 1969 - who reads the news on Sundays. We tend to have an awful lot of people from the past on Sundays who have come forward wanting to help, including Jimi King, Mike Knight, Pat Edison and Mike Hayes. We'll make the most out of our past history and we'll evolve into a new Radio Jackie of today. We prefer to take on presenters who live locally, so that they can relate easily to incidents and pronounce names of localities with confidence. I see Radio Jackie as a stepping-stone for some presenters, and we have many new, enthusiastic people coming to us. We've got a lot of volunteers and some are very good, so I take them on as paid staff. Others just thoroughly enjoy radio, just as we did in the 1970s and early 1980s when a lot of us were unpaid.

HOW DIFFERENT IS IT TO RUN RADIO JACKIE AS A LEGAL STATION?

There was no real appeal in being a pirate. We knew we were doing something that was pioneering, but the fact that there wasn't a licence available was a problem. We had to show the government that this sort of radio was popular and sustainable, and we were proven to be right.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO TAKE RADIO JACKIE?

To an embarrassingly large percentage of the South West London audience.



Tony Collis