



Steve Warren

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Number One's That Ain't

Among ourselves, we have been talking much in the past year about the inaccuracies of the two main 'reporting' charts; R&R and Gavin. My current estimation is the charts are about 60% accurate. Used to rate them at 70% but that's deteriorated.

Here's the most obvious example. "You Gotta Love That", Neil McCoy. The record just hit #1 in the R&R chart. Probably did the same in Gavin, though I don't even look at that one anymore.

A Number One record. The single is not in the national Top 75 Soundscan list. Neither is the album, although McCoy's last single, "If I Was a Drinkin' Man" still sells enough to remain in the top 50 week after week.

Nobody in the business watches requests closer than I do and I can tell you for a fact there have been virtually no calls for the record.

If a record is not selling and not requesting...the record is not a HIT. So how does it get to #1? Well, the record promoter's pitch is: It's doing great in call-out. This week a guy read me the national call out rankings from one of the research companies that does the work for about a hundred stations. They had the song listed as the #5 best-testing record of the week.

Oh, really? In my files I have a list that company published two years ago listing the best testing songs for the first six months of '94. The Number One song was Darron Norwood "If It Wasn't For Her, I Wouldn't Have You". Bigger than "I Swear", bigger than "Don't Take The Girl". I'm not kidding here. Norwood, of course, was dropped by his record label because he didn't sell. The only 'hit' he had was in the call-out stats. (few of my clients played that stiff, fortunately for us.)

Now, before I get back onto my soapbox about the total waste of time and money and the inaccuracies that are inherent in call-out music research, let's just compare those reportedly high call out

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ratings with the results from an auditorium test KKBQ just did in Houston.

“You Gotta Love That” was put into the test. Not only does PD Dene Hallam meticulously prepare the best hook tapes in the business, he also has Larry Rosin’s company conduct the research. I believe Edison Research has the best system for conducting auditorium tests in radio. I’ll tell you about that another time. Bottom line is, this is the most reliable music research that can be done.

The stats which were delivered about 10 days ago show that one out of 4 people who are familiar with the McCoy song does not like it. Now these are core Country listeners. 21 to 44 years of age. And 25% of them dislike the record. Considering the rock-nature of the record, I can only imagine how big the negatives would be if we tested it with listeners 45+.

So the record was not requesting, not selling and the most reliable form of music research in radio shows one out of four people DISLIKE it!! How does such a record get to #1 on the R & R chart?

Part of it is the tempo thing. Many of today’s programmers feel they have to be 70% up tempo if they are going to be a player in the format. McCoy got extra brownie points for tempo.

But mostly they play it because it’s on the charts. The vast majority of programmers are doing no research at all. The chart is the only thing they use to guide them. As long as it’s is on the list, they’ll keep playing it.

Knowing that, the record companies use every ounce of ink they can get to sustain airplay and push a song higher and higher up the list. I do not fault them for this. It is their job and serves their purposes. They get bonuses for high chart positions.

But we’re not in the record business. And playing records that aren’t hits is a dangerous game. It stifles ratings and ultimately results in revenue losses. It has certainly killed a lot of “young Country” stations in the last year, too.

Next week, I’ll have more to say about the charts.

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