

What Pop Could Learn From 1966



HzS  G  d

“Fighting to Stay Free”

#184...May 2014

And now, ladies and gentlemen...

...it doesn't matter what business you're in: the goal is always to become more efficient and maximize revenue.

The music business is no exception. Producing a product that consumers will, well, consume is a far more careful – and far less scattershot – process than it was nearly 50 years ago.

There are obvious reasons for this. Over that time, a universe of more than 70 high-profile record companies shrunk down to just three, which gave each resulting company the resources to better serve consumers not just nationally but globally, and to forge better relations with not just radio but all mass media. Concurrently, the number of companies in the radio business also shrunk to where there are three that control most stations playing contemporary music, making it easier to orchestrate a

national hit vs. one that moves from region to region. Third, consumer activity - whether that be purchasing or just listening to music - became easier to measure and with far greater accuracy. Finally, several generations of students fascinated with music and radio entered the business with the acumen to develop effective marketing plans and strategies for new music.

Would the music and music delivery businesses say they're better off for these changes? Most certainly. As a result, is recorded product of a higher quality and more easily available? I'd have to say yes.

And is the consumer better served? Welllllll.....

To help answer that last question, we need to take a trip back to the year 1966. Why not 1964 and exactly 50 years ago? Two reasons: 1) 1964 was, for reasons fairly obvious to most pains (Yeah? Yeah, yeah) an unusual year for the business, where just about everything changed, from the relative importance of albums vs. singles to the listener makeup of top 40 and easy listening formatted radio stations. 2) Those changes in music and consumers/listeners in 1964 led to a larger revolution at radio in 1965, when KHJ put the faster-paced and more music-focused Drake format on the map.

So by 1966, the pieces were in place for what eventually became the situation we have today, with all the players in the game well defined. Only at that time, music kept changing and the target kept moving. There wasn't a lot of organized (or affordable) research to indicate what songs "worked" (never mind sold). Radio stations were more likely to be owned and run by smaller companies (or individuals) with a more local focus, which meant PDs could add any - and as many - new records as desired each week. Add to that so many record companies in the mix - including hundreds of fly-by-night labels that got lucky one time - which meant there were far more records vying for attention, and arguably easier entry for more songs onto the national top 100 charts.



2014, meet 1966.

One more thing. Because there was still just one radio format in 1966 which played the most popular songs - and the only way for consumers to hear those songs whenever they wanted was to purchase every 45 RPM record, which for most was economically unfeasible - top 40 radio, as the only game in town, commanded such a large listening audience that songs played several times a day were actually heard by more people all of those times they played. This meant the life cycle for any hit song was far shorter and faster than before and what is the case today.

How much of a difference are we talking? Take a look at the aforementioned KHJ's "Boss 30" survey for May 11, 1966 (below). The average song had been on KHJ's survey for four weeks, with the longest-running song at 11 weeks. Fast-forward to the same week in 2014 on the modern-day equivalent of KHJ, L.A.'s KIIS-FM (which I'd also show here, had I permission to do so). Average stay on the top 30, 9 weeks. Longest-running song, 25 weeks.

KHJ'S "BOSS 30" RECORDS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA!
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Last Week	This Week	TITLE	ARTIST	LABEL	Weeks On Boss 30
(1)	1.	WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN	Percy Sledge	Atlantic	5
(3)	2.	A GROOVY KIND OF LOVE	The Mindbenders	Fontana	4
(4)	3.	HEY JOE	The Leaves	Mira	4
(7)	4.	ALONG COMES MARY	The Association	Valiant	5
(11)	5.	THE SUN AIN'T GONNA SHINE	The Walker Brothers	Smash	5
(5)	6.	RAINY DAY WOMEN #12 & #35	Bob Dylan	Columbia	6
(13)	7.	MY LITTLE RED BOOK	Love	Elektra	4
(21)	8.	IT'S A MAN'S MAN'S MAN'S WORLD	James Brown	King	3
(25)	9.	PAINT IT, BLACK	The Rolling Stones	London	2
(2)	10.	MONDAY, MONDAY	The Mamas & The Papas	Dunhill	7
(19)	11.	FUNNY HOW LOVE CAN BE	Danny Hutton	MGM	3
(6)	12.	TIME WON'T LET ME	The Outsiders	Capitol	8
(23)	13.	DID YOU EVER HAVE TO MAKE UP YOUR MIND?	Lovin' Spoonful	Kama Sutra	2
(15)	14.	LOVE IS LIKE AN ITCHING IN MY HEART	The Supremes	Motown	4
(9)	15.	SLOOP JOHN B	The Beach Boys	Capitol	7
(27)	16.	YOUNGER GIRL	The Handells	Mercury	2
(28)	17.	I AM A ROCK	Simon & Garfunkel	Columbia	2
(8)	18.	THE RAINS CAME	Sir Douglas Quintet	Tribe	8
(14)	19.	EIGHT MILES HIGH	The Byrds	Columbia	8
(HB)	20.	DON'T BRING ME DOWN	The Animals	MGM	1
(10)	21.	SOUL AND INSPIRATION	The Righteous Brothers	Verve	11
(Return)	22.	GOT MY MOJO WORKING	Jimmy Smith	Verve	2
(-)	23.	HOLD ON! I'M A COMIN'	Sam & Dave	Stax	1
(24)	24.	TEENAGE FAILURE	Chad & Jeremy	Columbia	5
(12)	25.	GOOD LOVIN'	The Young Rascals	Atlantic	7
(26)	26.	NOTHING'S TOO GOOD FOR MY BABY	Stevie Wonder	Tamla	3
(HB)	27.	GREEN GRASS	Gary Lewis	Liberty	1
(-)	28.	YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY YOU LOVE ME	Dusty Springfield	Philips	1
(HB)	29.	COME AND GET ME	Jackie deShannon	Imperial	1
(30)	30.	HOW DOES THAT GRAB YOU, DARLIN'?	Nancy Sinatra	Reprise	2

THE POPULARITY OF RECORDS LISTED HEREIN IS THE OPINION OF KHJ BASED ON ITS SURVEY OF RECORD SALES IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CORRELATED WITH LISTENER REQUESTS

Is this to say the life of a hit today in L.A. (and really, most any market in the U.S.) is more than twice as long as it was in 1966? Try longer, as in neither case are we counting the weeks songs played on KHJ or KIIS before entering the Boss/top 30. In KHJ/Drake's case, songs spent at most three weeks as a "hitbound" before entering the Boss 30, with most jumping on after one or two weeks, or jumping right on in the case of a real hot new tune. Not so for KIIS (et al). While the average song plays at least two weeks before achieving top 30-level airplay, this doesn't tell the whole story: many songs on top 40 these days get 'minimal exposure' at the rate of one to three plays a week for as long as months before being slotted into regular rotation.

Even that doesn't tell the entire story, when you consider the additional time from a song's first exposure on any media until top 40 finally decides to pull the trigger. Most often that first exposure's on another contemporary radio format - which of course didn't exist in 1966 - that "warms up" the song for top 40. Bastille's "Pompeii," the song which has played on KIIS-FM for 25 weeks - so going back to last November - got its first radio play back in January 2013 on an alternative-formatted station. Top 40 reaction time for a song like "Pompeii" in 1966 - by an artist with no track record at the format, where it's all about the song - would have been a matter of weeks as opposed to that song's 11 months. There's a perfect example of such a song on KHJ's Boss 30: Sam & Dave's "Hold On! I'm A Comin'," which had been on R&B radio just a few weeks at that point and which jumped right in at No. 23 without having been hitbound.

The 1966 equivalent of 2014's biggest hit to date, Pharrell Williams' "Happy," would have surely been on top 40 shortly after any PD walked out of the first showing of the movie that included the song in a pivotal scene. Who sitting in a theater as early as last July 3rd wasn't moved by "Happy" while watching the kids-targeted CGI film *Despicable Me 2* (<http://youtu.be/Mdr8vI37MvY>)? The answer: all but four top 40 PDs, who gave "Happy" a handful of spins last July. 50 more stations did the same for the next six months, but it wasn't until January, when Columbia officially took the song to top 40, that the ball got rolling. It's an ideal example of how mega-record companies and mega-radio groups work together in 2014: we've gone from "you say it, we play it" to "you play it WHEN we say it."

It's also worth noting that while Columbia had nearly as many songs in play that week in '66 on KHJ than the same week on KIIS this year, four of the label's five songs on KIIS were "born" at least nine months earlier, compared to the near-instant reaction time for all four of them on KHJ. Perhaps the bigger story: just those four singles made CBS the dominant record company of the 20 represented by songs on the Boss 30, while Sony Music's 11 songs including Columbia's five place it second to Universal's 14 for most songs on KIIS-FM's top 30.

By current standards, the situation in 1966 was a mess. But what a beautiful mess. By this point in that year, ten singles had already reached the No. 1 spot on Billboard's Hot 100 (a total of 27 would get there for the entire year). On the aforementioned KHJ, the 8th of 23 No. 1s in 1966 was there this week, with no song having spent longer than four weeks on top. So, even if by some chance 2014 becomes remembered as the best year ever in the history of recorded music, it would still pale in comparison to 1966, which was like 2½ years by the current definition. To avoid making this *Hz So Good* twice its current length, I won't list every incredible song that made an impact in 1966 (although a bunch of them are listed on that KHJ survey), but I will mention that nearly 11% of this year's I.R.S. 1040 (and nearly 13% of the Top 104) came from that year. That's 108 songs from 1966 that didn't even reach the top 10, but according to you really shoulda.

While I understand the changes in the game and how much more it takes to reach critical mass with any song in 2014 - especially with a constantly distracted consumer, for whom not just a radio station but all of FM radio is just another choice - there's an argument to be made that the business(es) could still learn a lot from 1966, such as:

- Tempting as it is (and seemingly profitable in the short run) to continue to keep established hits in loony rotation on the back end (note: there was no such thing as a recurrent in 1966), some of those slots could be forked over to all the new (and often already-sales-and-stream-proven) music out there waiting those extra weeks (or forever?) for an add. Might that keep a significant cut of listeners from wandering to where they can discover those songs some other place first? Which leads to...

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- One station in every market could experiment with taking an aggressive 1966-like stance on new music, so much that that's the niche. Or is it too late for that?
- Part of the reason 1966 was so exciting was that even when the music was terrible, air personalities made it sound great with enthusiasm, info about the songs and artists and entertaining talk-ups to beat the band. If we can make that a reason to listen to radio again, does it allow top 40 to become a stage for more new hits every day?
- While we're in a metric-heavy world where picking the hits way in advance has become more a science than ever, local programmers and talent could be taking the lead a little more, so the next time a "Happy" pops up on any media, radio forces the labels' hand for a change.

To quote a hit from this week in 1966, when it comes to music these days, radio should learn "to pick up on one and leave the other behind" a lot more often.

I.R.S.: In case you missed it...

It was the biggest party ever for the songs that 'really shoulda' been top 10, and you can re-live it all whenever you'd like at <http://www.60s70s.org/IRS>. Check the lists and hear the big Rewound Radio countdown with Bob Radil and myself. And the party's still going on Facebook, at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/731369260214413/>.

Hz So Good online (current issue and archive back to 2010) at <http://www.60s70s.org/HzSoGood/>.

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