



Two for One: You Betcha Gretchen

WKIS 99.9's new digital HD2 program channel is no Jack radio. But it is the first country radio station named after a major country star—the “redneck woman” herself (drum roll, please)... Gretchen Wilson.

Beasley-owned WKIS 99.9 in Miami leapfrogged over all the usual program choices and went straight to the outlaw of country to make its debut in multicasting in January 2006.

The station made the leap one year after installing a BE HD Radio transmission system that enabled it to broadcast its Kiss Country format in digital. Multicasting an additional channel along with its main program on 99.9MHz was a simple matter of adding and setting up a single piece of equipment—and adding the programming.

“We thought of all the usual formats, but we needed a format we could promote to our current listeners that would somewhat appeal to them. I couldn't see going to our Country listeners and saying, ‘Hey, we got a Classical station on HD,’” says WKIS 99.9 Program Director Bob Barnett.



WKIS 99.9 Program Director—Bob Barnett

Barnett envisioned an eclectic part rock and part country format, with a playlist that would give Country listeners the “fresh brashness that’s missing from the mainstream.” He approached Gretchen Wilson with the idea, and the station was launched in January, coinciding with the release date of Wilson's *All Jacked Up* album.

Operating under the format moniker of Gretchen 99, the station airs cuts from musically inventive, creative “outlaws” of mainstream Country, including Hank Williams Jr., Charlie Daniels Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Travis Tritt, and Toby Keith.

With Gretchen 99 just askew of the garden-variety Country format that typically appeals to women, the station is capturing a new segment of the Country market: disenfranchised Country rockers, many of them men. And, the HD2 channel could prove to be a bonus come diary time. “Arbitron is what drives the bus for us, so where Gretchen 99 fits into the Arbitron scheme of things is important,” comments Barnett. He says Gretchen 99 won't be rated as a station separate from Kiss Country for at least two years, when Arbitron's Portable People Meter will arrive in the Miami market and be able to pick up discrete channel listenership. In the meantime, when Gretchen 99 gets written into the diary, it gets attributed to Kiss Country—a definite ratings bonus. “We get two for the price of one,” adds Barnett.

Gretchen Wilson entertains at the Kiss Country annual Chili Fest in January of this year.

Photo courtesy of Sandy Sloane, Kiss Country Radio Station