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Active Rock

The term often used for stations which play rock music designed to be played loudly, such as “hard rock”, “metal”, and “heavy metal”.

Adult Album Alternative (AAA)

A station which plays largely current music which tends to appeal more to adults than to teenagers. AAA playlists are much broader than the limited playlists of hit radio, and therefore depend on album tracks as well as on music released or designated as singles. Stylistically, such stations may play rock, folk-rock, country-rock, modern rock, blues, folk, and world music. Some publications refer to the adult oriented rock music heard on AAA stations as “Progressive Rock”, not to be confused with the 70’s music of the same name.

Adult Alternative

A station which plays current hits, whether single releases or popular album tracks, which tend to appeal to adults more than to teenagers. Playlists are drawn from rock, pop, country rock, folk rock and blues releases. There are no stations of this type in the New York area.

Adult Contemporary (AC)

A station primarily playing popular and rock music released during the past fifteen or twenty years, designed for general listeners rather than for listeners actively interested in hearing current releases. The playlists of many AC stations will also include a limited selection of older material and current hits. See Lite AC, Hot AC, and Rock AC.

Album Oriented Rock (AOR)

This is a format so named as to distinguish itself from Top 40 stations of the past, which played primarily singles. AOR stations thrived between the late 60’s and the 80’s, during the heyday of FM Rock Radio. See Rock, Classic Rock.

Alternative Rock

A station which plays rock music which is stylistically derivative of the Seattle grunge bands of the late 80’s, and to some extent, the punk/new wave artists of the late 70’s, rather than the “classic” rock artists of the 60’s and 70’s. These stations are aimed primarily at teenage audiences and feature mostly current single releases and popular album cuts. Since the Alternative Rock peak of the mid-90’s, many alternative rock bands (and stations) have evolved in the direction of modern rock, or in some cases, hard rock. See Modern Rock.

Americana

A station which plays mostly current country-rock, folk-rock, blues and American roots music which tends to appeal to adults more than to teenagers.

Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR)

A station which plays a significant amount of current popular music, whether singles or album cuts. As it is no longer unusual for a single to remain on the charts for 30-40 weeks or longer, “current” refers to music released within the last year. A more accurate description for “CHR” would be “Current Hit Radio”. This format is the descendent of the Top 40 stations popular from the 50’s through the 80’s. Although some CHR stations base their playlists on surveys of local record sales or phone requests, most rely on published charts such as the Billboard Hot 100. As of December, 1998, the Billboard Hot 100 chart began to include popular album tracks not commercially released as singles, and began weighing a song’s airplay three times as heavily as a song’s sales. The Billboard Hot 100 chart is therefore a measure of which songs are being played on CHR stations which, in turn, base their playlists on Billboard’s Hot 100 chart. Contemporary Hit Radio stations tend to concentrate on specific music styles, such as Rock or Urban, or a range of styles, such as Rock/Pop/Dance or R&B/Rap/Dance. Some CHR stations play a significant amount of hits released during the past ten or fifteen years, particularly if there are insufficient current hit releases which fall within the station’s stylistic range.

Dance

A station which plays music, whether or not current, produced primarily to be played for dancing. This type of music was originally known as Disco music. Stations which play mostly current Dance music are often referred to as “CHR-Rhythmic”, while stations which play Dance music of the past two decades are referred to as “Rhythmic AC”.

Ethnic/International

Programs which feature music, whether traditional or popular, of a particular ethnic group, nation, or region, and are aimed at listeners from the featured group or place. Compare to World Music.

Hot Adult Contemporary (Hot AC)

A station which plays commercial popular and rock music released during the past fifteen or twenty years which is more lively than the music played on the average Adult Contemporary station, but is still designed to appeal to general listeners rather than listeners interested in hearing current releases. Another definition of “Hot Adult Contemporary” used in the radio industry is an Adult Contemporary station which plays a significant amount of new rock/pop releases. There is no strict rule as to how much new material a station needs to play in order to be considered “CHR” rather than “Hot AC”. To confuse matters further, you will often see an “Adult Contemporary” music chart, which tracks current songs which appeal to adults but are more pop-oriented than songs found on the “Adult Alternative” chart. Billboard Magazine also compiles an “Adult Top 40” Chart, which tracks rock singles and album cuts which appeal to an adult audience. This chart reflects airplay on rock-oriented CHR stations as well as the new release airplay component of Hot AC stations. See AC, Lite AC, and Rock AC.

Lite Adult Contemporary (Lite AC)

A station playing particularly easy-going popular and rock music released during the past fifteen or twenty years designed to appeal to general listeners. This format is the descendent of the not-quite-extinct “Easy Listening” format of years past. See AC and Hot AC

Modern Rock

A station which plays mostly current rock music performed by artists which have become prominent during the past five to ten years. Stylistically, the music tends to fall between Rock and Alternative Rock. See Alternative Rock, Rock.

Oldies

A station which plays popular, rock ‘n roll, and rock music released during the “golden era of hit music”, roughly 1955-1975. The term “Oldies” is actually a misnomer; a more accurate name for this format would be “Golden Hits”, as music from the post-1975 period may qualify as “old” but will rarely qualify as “gold”. Across the country, the format of various Oldies stations vary, some playing 50’s and 60’s music, others 60’s, 70’s, and even 80`s music, 70’s music only, “rock oldies”, or r&b oldies. A format which became briefly popular in the 90`s was the “Jammin’ Oldies” format, which featured r&b oldies from the late 60’s and 70’s.

Personality

Programs or formats which rely on the personalities of an on-air host or hosts to entertain listeners, often with humor, parody, satire, or commentary on current events. Personality programming may also include music, interviews, and other features.

Rock

A station which plays mostly current rock music, whether single releases or album cuts. Due to the diversity within rock music today, the playlists of different rock stations will tend to fall within different stylistic ranges. See modern Rock, Alternative Rock, Active Rock, Rock AC.

Rock AC

A station which plays rock music released largely during the past fifteen or twenty years, designed for the general rock listener who is not actively interested in following current releases. These stations, sometimes known as “rock hits”, include some “classic rock” material and some current material in their playlists. Some of the “name” formats such as “Jack” include some pop material along with rock hits.

Smooth Jazz

A station which plays easy-going popular music with a “jazzy” feel, designed to set a mood rather than to invite critical listening. “Smooth Jazz” is often set to a medium-tempo or “hip-hop” beat. This format is often referred to as New Adult Contemporary, or “NAC”.

Standards/Big Band

A station which plays popular music recorded by the Big Bands of the late 30's and '40's, music recorded by Big Band-era singers during the 40's and '50's, and/or interpretations of the "standards" of that period, including recent interpretations. This format is primarily aimed at older adults and is sometimes referred to as "Adult Standards" or "Nostalgia" format. Some stations of this type will play any non-rock popular music of the past 60 years.

Talk

A format or program which features one or more hosts discussing current events and other topics, often in the context of a particular political ideology. Talk programs frequently feature in-studio guests and calls from members of the public, representing varying degrees of expertise. Health, medical, and financial topics are especially popular.

Urban

Stations or programs which plays music, such as rap, hip-hop, r&b, and soul, in the styles which are the descendents of rhythm & blues music of past decades. The mix favored by any given station depends in large part upon the age of the station's audience. Many Urban stations which appeal to adults rather than to teenagers include soul/r&b hits dating back twenty years or longer, and are sometimes characterized as "Urban AC".

World Music

Programs which play music which evokes musical styles of one or more regions of the world, but is not necessarily performed by musicians from those regions or aimed solely at listeners from those regions. Compare Ethnic/International Music.

***Other Music Formats**

Other popular music station formats include Jazz, Classical, Spanish, and Country. In some parts of the country, there are sub-categories within these formats, particularly with respect to country and Spanish-language music.