



JOEL DENVER

The Repeating CHR Music Cycle

Guy Zapoleon's theory on the format's problems

If you've heard the theory that CHR's current problems are cyclical, then you've probably overheard Guy Zapoleon — KHMJ/Houston PD, Nationwide Group PD, and soon-to-be consultant — holding forth at a recent dinner or convention. Herewith, his theory in detail.

While Zapoleon's CHR cycle concept has been around for a couple of years, his latest version is the most detailed explanation yet for CHR's sagging ratings. However, Zapoleon offers good reasons for optimism in the near future.

The State We're In

"CHR is a format based on playing today's hit music, and that encompasses the best of all styles of music: rock, pop, and R&B," says Zapoleon. "To understand the current state of CHR, one must comprehend the state of the contemporary music scene."

Zapoleon believes that where we are now is as predictable as where we'll be at a certain point in the future. "The contemporary music scene reflects a repeating nine to 10 year rock & roll cycle that has repeated since 1956. We are nearing the end of the fourth such cycle."

"The beginning of each cycle starts with *birth*, such as when a revolutionary new artist or trend hits the music scene. During the second phase [*extremes*], the music moves to Rock or R&B extremes. And during the final phase [*doldrums*], the pendulum swings to the opposite extreme, which is dominated by inoffensive pabulum." (See "Cycles 1-4" and "Defining The Cycles")



Guy Zapoleon

be able to hold its own even in the current doldrums period."

He goes on to detail how to make the best of the doldrums and how best to prepare for the coming birth cycle. "We must be visionary enough to center our efforts around CHR's 15-24 base. This doldrums period can be cut short if CHR gets back to the basics: great talent, great marketing/promotion, great production values, and — of course — a balanced current music mix."

"I agree with [Top 40 programmer/consultant] Paul Drew when he said, 'Top 40 is the ultimate variety format' playing the most popular music of the time from all genres of music."

"Many of the baby boomers' babies are now reaching their early teen years. There will be another population explosion — a new 'pig

Defining The Cycles

Here's a more detailed explanation of the three main phases of CHR, according to Guy Zapoleon.

BIRTH/REBIRTH — The music is fresh and new. It generally is at the top of a new musical trend, which is also the most mass-appeal in nature. A perfect balance exists between the three basic music styles: rock, pop, and R&B.

EXTREMES — The trendy, active core tires of the sound of this new music trend and accepts increasingly extreme music. CHR embraces these extremes like an addict moving from marijuana to cocaine to heroin. Eventually all come from other formats disappears, leaving only the active core.

DOLDRUMS — CHR realizes its mistake. It's lost all of the money demos by being too extreme, so it overcompensates. It then refuses to play anything but the most traditional-sounding music. During this period the audience is also more traditional in its tastes, but still craves some exciting new music. And the cycle repeats.

moving through the python.' The teen population is on the rise from now through the turn of the century. These young adults will embrace the ultimate variety format, CHR.

"The CHRs that don't overdo their emphasis on adults will enjoy

strong ratings — including 25-34 adults who will flock to hear the fantastic new crop of music coming in the next birth/rebirth cycle. The CHRs that try to be something they're not will soon be out of business — replaced by the next generation of CHRs that enjoy ratings success when the next cycle begins."

Charting The First Four Cycles

After careful study, Guy Zapoleon has identified — by names of artists and fads — the four cycles we've been through since Top 40's inception.

Cycle 1		
BIRTH 1956 Pop/Rock/R&B Elvis/Chuck Berry/Drifters	EXTREMES 1960 Dance Chubby Checker/ Little Eva/Dee Dee Sharp	DOLDRUMS 1961 Chicken Rock The Bobbys (Vinton/Rydell/Vee) Country Crossovers J. Cash/Skeeter Davis
Cycle 2		
REBIRTH 1964 Pop/Rock/R&B Beatles/Stones/Motown	EXTREMES 1969 Acid Rock Hendrix/Cream/Zeppelin	DOLDRUMS 1971 Soft Rock Helen Reddy/James Taylor Country Crossovers John Denver/Anne Murray
Cycle 3		
REBIRTH 1974 Pop/Rock/R&B Fleetwood Mac/Eagles/ Stevie Wonder	EXTREMES 1978 Disco Chic/Donna Summer	DOLDRUMS 1980 AC Barry Manilow/Neil Diamond/ Barbra Streisand Country Crossovers Urban Cowboy/Kenny Rogers/ Eddie Rabbitt
Cycle 4		
REBIRTH 1982-83 Pop/Rock/R&B/MTV Eurythmics/Culture Club/ B. Springsteen/J. Mellencamp/ M. Jackson/Madonna	EXTREMES 1989 Rap/Funk Hammer/Public Enemy/ Bell Biv DeVoe	DOLDRUMS 1991 Soft Rock Crossovers by Adult Artists Elton John/Billy Joel/ Gloria Estefan Country Crossover Garth Brooks/Billy Ray Cyrus

Zapoleon adds, "By examining the state of current music in CHR, you can see we're in the doldrums phase. We're swinging toward the opposite extreme from a heavy rap/funk-dominated music scene to one where we play non-irritating, non-exciting, safe music as a mainstay."

"The doldrums is when CHR has always had an identity crisis and picked up on music styles that don't normally cross over, like country, new age, and jazz. This happens because the audience is thirsting for anything different and exciting instead of the same sounds over and over again."

"During this time, adult formats — particularly AC, Country, and Rock formats — explode as CHR borrows from their music. In the past — and now again — CHR has always overreacted and eliminated too much R&B or rock which, along with pop, are the key elements of the format. This is all in an effort to attract 25-54 adults. During this period CHR usually plays more and more oldies, which will send the 15-24 base to MTV, the Box, and radio formats like New Rock and youth-based rock or Urban stations. No wonder the CHR numbers continue to crumble"

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Ignoring History

Why don't we learn from past history? Zapoleon maintains, "We keep thinking things will change, and we always forget the basics. Then someone like [Hot Hits consultant] Mike Joseph or [Boss Radio inventor and current KRTH/Los Angeles consultant] Bill Drake will come along and talk to the listeners, find out what they want, and present it in an uncomplicated manner."

"When the format heads into the extremes period you need visionary people. We look at the charts and say, 'These extreme titles are popular,' without detecting the undercurrent of dissatisfaction from the non-actives, whom I'll call 'Joe & Jane Average Listener.' They get tired of a steady diet of extremes and can't identify with them, because they really want variety."

"So when CHR finally detects the negatives, it overreacts, like what's happening now as everybody says, 'Rap is out.' Just like

Continued on Page 36