



ASCAP Presents...The Mike Kinosian Interview: Joan Gerberding

May 9, 2008

No Ordinary Joan

Persistence is an exemplary characteristic provided the pursued goal is realistically obtainable.

Admirable beyond words are those who persevere for not only their lot in life but for others like them who'll benefit from the trendsetter's initiatives.



It's difficult to imagine the industry the past 35 years without Joan Gerberding being an integral part of it, yet nabbing that first radio assignment didn't come easily.

An impressive string of upper-level management positions has nevertheless followed including her most recent appointment two months ago (3-3-2008) as DMI Music & Media Networks' (formerly Private Label Radio) Senior VP/Advertiser Solutions.

Learn By Doing

Highly noteworthy, especially when considering the bravura portfolio she's authored, is the nugget that in her formative years Gerberding wasn't one of those who absolutely had to be in radio. "I went to [West Chester University of Pennsylvania in the late-1960s] to major in Music," she explains. "At the end of my sophomore year I felt I needed to start doing something, rather than learning about it and began working in the advertising field in New York City."

After having strung together jobs as a copywriter, company photographer and ad agency junior AE, Gerberding in 1973 moved to beautiful Cape Cod where she bought a sea captain's 150-year-old house and restored it. "Every weekend before the following month's mortgage was due," she remarks, "I'd hire myself out to do wallpapering."

That routine lasted the better part of a year when her life took a dramatic change after she spotted a newspaper ad for an AE position at WCOD/Hyannis, MA. "I had all that advertising background and thought I could do that job," Gerberding unequivocally states. "I knew I could sell because I was selling myself. It was an excellent [job] interview that lasted about an hour and I knew I nailed it."



One slight problem: When she got together with the General Sales Manager, he told Gerberding she was indeed highly qualified yet he wasn't going to hire her. "He said women were just too much trouble. I called him twice a day for the next two weeks. At the end of the second week, he offered me the job."

Within five years Gerberding rose through the ranks ultimately becoming VP/Sales Manager; however, WCOD in 1980 was in the process of being sold. "Many buyers would come in and literally clean house and bring in their own people," she points out. "I wasn't ready to wait for that to happen. My dad started a bank in the Princeton, NJ area and advertised on Nassau Broadcasting stations. He told me about a [possible] opening there for a sales manager. I called and was literally hired over the phone. They needed someone and I fit the bill."

Everything in that conversation clicked and Gerberding began at Nassau three weeks later and would remain with the company more than 20 years ascending to the highest echelons of its management structure. "I had the ability to have a different job every few years because I kept working my way up," she enthusiastically declares. "It's something different every day in radio anyway. It was very exciting and very rewarding."

National Spotlight

Not only that, she began establishing a high industry profile and, for two years, was National President of American Women in Radio & Television. "They called and asked if I'd be on the board," recalls Gerberding who did that for a year before serving the maximum two-year term in AWRT's top national job. "I came up with a program that is still making money for the foundation. I was responsible for the largest single donation in AWRT's [then] 50-year history."

At a time when Nassau Broadcasting owned 21 radio properties (1997), Gerberding initiated its national rep division, Jersey Radio Network. "In three years, we took [billing] from \$2 million to \$10 million," she proudly states. "It was a way for us to have a dedicated national sales force [who] worked with our national rep [Katz] and regional accounts on our own."

Quite simply, the idea was to educate buyers that the Garden State is neither New York nor Philadelphia but ... New Jersey. "With one phone call [to us, an advertiser] could cover four million of the seven million people living in New Jersey at that time," Gerberding remarks. "We did a complete and very successful campaign which included a seven-minute video showing our stations. In 2000, we launched a digital signage business company [but] to be honest, by 2004 I was burned out and needed a break."



That respite was short-lived as Arbitron's Pierre Bouvard recruited her to help build the company's out-of-home division. "I said the fairly aggressive projections they had in mind weren't going to be [met]," Gerberding candidly recalls. "It was a very difficult sell [because] most people in that industry segment didn't really think they needed research. Many outdoor companies were mom and pop [operations] and didn't want to pay for research when they'd been selling [for so long] without it. We had to create the need first and that was very difficult [unless you were] one of the big guys like Clear Channel or Viacom. To make it more cost-effective [Arbitron] ended up rolling that division into [another one] and my job was eliminated."

There was momentary disappointment and depression associated with that but as Gerberding comments, "You pick yourself, dust yourself off and say to yourself you're very good at what you do and you move on. Someone who's been in the industry as long as I have can come back from failures and learn from them. As a salesperson, you must have a lot of confidence in your own talent and ability. Having sold advertising for so many years, I've [told my salespeople] not to take it personally [if they don't make a sale]. Someone is rejecting the idea and not you. If things are done for the right reasons and you have a good heart, you meet with success."

Customized Compositions

In her role as Access 1 Communications' Director of Radio Operations, Gerberding encountered "some wonderful people" and summarizes that stint as a good experience. "Some stations weren't necessarily in the best [places while others] were in decent markets," she frankly states. "With the economy and radio going the way it is it's hard to sell stations that aren't first, second or third in markets that aren't in peoples' minds when they want to advertise."

Last year while President of Focus360's LocalFocus, Gerberding entertained the notion of coming up with a plan to represent alternative out-of-home or new media companies. "I began putting it out there we'd be doing that," she notes. "[The people there] wanted to have me rep [the company] because they needed to do some advertising but didn't want to do it in-house. I was about to sign a contract with them when a Joint Sales Agreement was done with Interep and the division was essentially eliminated - as was my job."

Six weeks later Gerberding received a call from someone new to Private Label Radio who was aware of Gerberding's history with the company. "I was asked if I'd be interested in doing consulting work or joining [as an employee]," she explains. "I flew to California and literally fell in love with the place and the people. In a very short period of time, I was hired."



Moreover and of greater importance she endorsed the entity's concept of creating personalized radio stations for in-retail locations. "It's a custom music company [so the end result] is very transparent," Gerberding remarks. "[Instead of saying 'Private Radio'], it features the client's name and is [heard] at the stores. Most people here are musicians or composers and they [tailor the product] to each [client]. This place is so vital and it's [about] music. As my field of study and having been in it in some way most of my life, I love music. It is done to create a sound awareness of the particular client. It isn't a 'Blue Light Special'-thing. It is very engaging and targets the specific market of that particular store. We [also] do national cine-media [Cinema Sounds] on 14,000 movie theaters."

Working primarily from her New Jersey home Gerberding is creating a new advertising division for DMI Music & Media Networks. "We're going to ad agencies and advertisers to present an opportunity for them to have their clients do sponsorships of particular programming pieces or dayparts in each radio program. Stores, retailers and others in the business of selling consumer goods and services need to do something to differentiate themselves and make the shopping experience more pleasant and more engaging to keep people there longer. That differentiation is going to be a service [such as ours]."

Puzzling Paradox

Included in an August 1999 list highlighting 20 prominent female broadcasters, Gerberding six months later attended a luncheon arranged by RAB's then President/CEO Gary Fries to recognize those individuals. "We basically asked ourselves what we could do to give back to the industry," she recounts of the genesis of the Most Influential Women in Radio (now Mentoring & Inspiring Women). "Thirteen of us decided to make it an informal group and actually try to do something. I was asked to be the group's spokesperson. We've done a mentoring program every year and release gender analysis numbers. Our website has contact/networking information and we've staffed RAB and NAB panels every year. Working with MIW is a fulltime job [but] women are very good at multitasking. You learn to facilitate things quickly."

Percentages for female programmers have essentially remained flat since 1995.

Occasional blips aside, it has held steady at approximately 10% and as Gerberding opines, "That is very odd when you consider 53% of the 10,600 radio stations target women. GMs are at about 16% and that's also been pretty flat since 1995. We've really excelled though in the GSM position [approximately 30%] and that's very positive. We're running sales departments, getting advertising revenue and contributing to station profitability. Those GSMs are being put into the pipeline to get to a GM position."



Only one instant/definitive answer is given when it comes to Gerberding's mentor/role model and no one can argue with her choice. "It's my dad, who passed away a little over three years ago," she states. "He was president of a number of banks and helped many people. He was open, friendly and had a great sense of humor. He really made a difference in the world and certainly affected everyone he touched."

Roaming The Wild West

Numerous other options nip away at terrestrial radio's ad dollars as our medium tries very hard to maintain its position. "In many ways, [medium-market] and small-market radio stations are doing a better job of it than [are stations] in larger markets," the former Vice President of the New Jersey Broadcasters Association comments. "Of course, there are many variables there."

Shocked about the Department of Justice's approval of the XM-Sirius merger (although it still requires FCC sanction), she labels it as unfair competition. "The FCC has certainly regulated the radio industry and I think they should regulate this as well. I don't think the DOJ understands exactly what this means to the business. Satellite radio has done a heck of a job promoting itself [but] people often forget it still only hits [approximately] 20 million people a week, compared to [terrestrial radio's] 280 million. We need to step up and do another PR job. I still remember the fantastic 'Radio Is Red Hot' campaign. Broadcasters have to get back the faith in our product. It is really important we toot our own horn."

Usually listening to radio when she's working in her home office and in the car, Gerberding however admits to occasionally playing CDs. "I feel I need to get away [from radio] because it's work," she comments. "I listen to [University of Pennsylvania public station] WXPN and absolutely love it. I also listen to [Greater Media/Philadelphia Adult Hits] WBEN-FM and [Jerry Lee-owned Adult Contemporary] 'B101' [WBEB/Philadelphia]."

Rome and Tuscany are among this avid traveler's favorite destinations. "I've been there and to Germany quite a few times [and] spent Christmas and New Year's in Rome," Gerberding points out. "There's something about that place that draws you in and is very healing. I can speak Italian and German but only in nouns and verbs. I also love to walk and have done a number of walking tours in Europe."

Usually those capable of embracing change can flourish and Gerberding believes her new venture can be very successful. "I'd like us to create a real presence in this segment of the new media industry. At this stage of my career, I don't miss [the day-to-day radio station environment although] I miss some of the people. I'm still active in the MIW group and have those remarkable women as wonderful friends. Everything is different now. This is like the old days when FM and cable



television first came in – it’s the Wild West. We have an opportunity to be entrepreneurial and that’s what I want to do here.”

WHO: Joan Gerberding

WHAT: Senior Vice President/Advertising Solutions

WHERE: DMI Music & Media Networks (formerly Private Label Radio)

HOW LONG: Since March 3, 2008

by Mike Kinosian

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