

# L.A. is fine-tuned to radio

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"Dees and Thomas can do whatever they want, but they can't minimize the 'Shannon effect,'" says Shannon, 41, who went on the air two weeks before schedule to throw off his competitors. "They're going to be affected by my presence. They can run, but they can't hide. I'm going to get them in the end."

That claim isn't just bravado. In 1983, Shannon took New York's WHIT from "worst to first" in just 74 days, and kept it on top until accepting the L.A. offer. He left in January to attempt the same trick for the former KIQQ, L.A.'s 17th-ranked station. The Westwood One media conglomerate paid \$56 million for the station, along with a reported \$2.3 million yearly for Shannon's services.

Thomas, 37, whose salary is estimated at just under \$1 million, isn't worried. "We're going to kick the hell out of him."

Dees, 39, reportedly paid a little under \$2 million, declined to comment.

The shootout has high stakes. The 6-10 a.m. morning drive period represents 55 percent to 60 percent of a station's revenue, says Jim Duncan, Indianapolis-based publisher of *American Radio*, a trade publication.

Even though New York is larger, more money is spent by advertisers in L.A. (\$334 million to Gotham's \$294.2 million in 1988), says Duncan.

"Los Angeles is the best radio market in the country," says Jeff Smulyan, president of Emmis Broadcasting, which owns KPWR, plus stations in New York, Indianapolis and Houston. "People there use radio more aggressively, in their cars in the morning and afternoons, at the beach on weekends. In other cities, they don't spend as much time listening."

L.A. also is a market where radio habits can change overnight. In January 1986, the "Magic 106" soft-rock station became "Power 106," an urban Top-40 station playing dance music. By September, it was No. 1, ahead of traditional Top-40 KIIS, owned by the Gannett Co., publisher of USA TODAY.

KQLZ is hoping to carve a piece of the pie with a new program mix that emphasizes hard rock/heavy metal (Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Living Colour, Poison and Metallica) and mainstream hits by Madonna, Paula Abdul and Rod Stewart.

Westwood One president Norman J. Pattiz says the format "gives us an opportunity. If people are out there buying this music and no one is playing it (on the radio), maybe someone should be playing it."

Their formats may be different, but all three share a characteristic: being wild and crazy in the morning. Dees, famed for the 1976 novelty hit *Disco Duck* and a syndicated countdown radio show, specializes in impersonations and song parodies. Thomas, who appears occasionally on NBC's *Cheers* as Carla's husband, does what he calls "poo-poo" humor — toilet and sexual jokes.

Thomas and Shannon are expert practitioners of the "morning zoo" format — a DJ amidst an array of sound effects and cast of regular zanies, who talk to the audience on the telephone, do song parodies, make jokes about current events and play hit records.

Shannon brought his Morning Zoo show, created with Cleveland Wheeler in Tampa, Fla., to New York. It clicked. Zoos began popping up across the U.S.A.

Thomas claims that he created the Zoo format when he was at WAPE in Jacksonville, Fla. "We called the station the *Big Ape*, get it?" To welcome Shannon to L.A., he renamed his show *The Morning Zoo*. "I got it copyrighted, which means he can't use it."

KIIS has launched a campaign promoting Dees and is sponsoring a \$1 million giveaway.

"Shannon's problem is that when he went on the air in New York, he had no big competitor," says *American Radio's* Duncan. "But here he has two. Power and KIIS are real strong, and aren't about to just roll over."

In the latest ratings period (October-December), Power 106 had 7.2 percent of the total audience, down from 7.4 in the summer, while KIIS had 5.8

percent, down from 6.8. In the mornings, Dees is ahead with 7.2 to Thomas' 6.7.

"It's the biggest challenge I've ever faced," Shannon says. "I have no doubts that I'm in for a very tough battle, and I don't think I'll do it in 74 days like I did in New York. But Dees and Thomas are in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm going to have the No. 1 radio station in Los Angeles."

The son of a career Army officer, Shannon's radio career began in the Army and has taken him from Nashville to Atlanta to Washington, Tampa and New York. He has a week-end countdown show syndicated by Westwood One. His wife and 2-year-old daughter didn't come to L.A. until Saturday, preferring to wait until he got his show on the air.

Without a daily dose of microphone, Shannon hasn't felt complete. "I've been going crazy, clipping things out of the paper, waiting to comment on things."

"I'm very shy. But you put me in a room, close the door and turn the mike on and I'm a happy man."

Shannon's Zoo cohorts remain in New York. But he still plans to do basically the same thing. "I'm not a comedian, I'm not really a great DJ, I'm just a guy who got lucky enough to be on the radio. I'm a guy who likes to have a good time, read stories out of the newspaper and take callers' opinions. I'm more of a creative director."

Shannon calls himself a "student of music" and owns 10,000 albums, mostly oldies. He doesn't play them on the air, because "so many kids think Paul McCartney is some old guy who used to be in Wings."

"I play what the public wants. I don't try to dictate taste. They like to hear songs they know and a few new songs. The 16-24 audience I cater to doesn't want to hear music they don't recognize."

His departure from New York took the industry by surprise. It's rare for a DJ to leave a major market while on top.

"People were shocked," Shannon says. "But I'm like the Lone Ranger. I like to do a job and then move on for a new challenge."