

BUSINESS PROFILE

WAIR brings Motown sound to Twin City to boost ratings

By JOHN HINTON
Chronicle Staff Writer

The Motown sound has arrived in Winston-Salem.

Radio station WAIR changed its format on Aug. 7 from urban contemporary or rhythm and blues music to "Heart and Soul -- Motown and More."

"We decided to change the format because we felt there was a void of Motown music being played in this market," said Nick P. Patella, owner of the station. "We want to provide the black market with entertainment they can't get anywhere else."

Black music spans the spectrum from rap to gospel music. We want a format that plays a specialized part of black music.

-- Nick P. Patella

Isaac "Zack" Wall, station manager at WAIR, said the new format will increase the station's listeners and advertisers.

"Other stations around the country have adopted a similar format," Wall said. "Their ratings have jumped."

The new format will feature black music with the Motown label and current hits, Wall said.

"We will still play music by artists such as Patti LaBelle, Diana Ross, Billy Ocean and Stevie Wonder," he said. "But 60 percent to 70 percent of our music is from Motown."

The format is intended for

adults 25 to 44 and women 18 to 49, Wall said. "The format is also intended for yuppies," he said.

The station, which first went on the air in 1938, is a 24-hour operation with a 1,000-watt tower. Its frequency is 1340-AM.

The station began broadcasting black music in 1979, Wall said.

The station will no longer play rap music, Wall and Patella said. "If people want to hear that kind of music, then they will have to listen to the other stations," Wall said.

"We found that rap music was

and forever," Wall said.

Response from advertisers and the community has been positive except from young listeners, Wall and Patella said. "We are still dedicated to serving the black community," Patella said.

"The new format has made the advertisers stand back and take notice of us," Wall said.

The new format will not affect the ratings for about 60 days, Patella said.

"We have been getting some telephone calls from kids who are upset that we are no longer playing rap music," Wall said. "We didn't play rap music in the past unless it was highly requested."

The station changed its format to develop "a niche within black music," Patella said.

"Black music spans the spectrum from rap to gospel music," he said. "We want a format that plays a specialized part of black music."

The station decided to concentrate on Motown music because it has gained widespread popularity with blacks and whites.

"It is easy to listen to and easy to dance to," said Patella. "People 25 and older grew up listening to Motown music."

Motown is the name of the record company that began in Detroit in the early 1960s and produced music by such black artists as Smokey Robinson, the Temptations and the Four Tops. Music from that era is now known as the "Motown sound."

antagonistic to some of our older listeners," Patella said. "You either love rap music or you hate it."

The Motown music comes from the Satellite Music Network, Wall said. "Everything is totally live, but we have local announcers in the booth pushing the buttons," he said.

"We have a product that no one else has in this market," Wall said. "Our goal is to expand our listening audience to become 80 percent black and 20 percent white."

The format is featured as the "best music of yesterday, today



The music of the Temptations and other Motown artists can now be heard on radio station WAIR. The group is shown here in a performance in Winston-Salem (photo by James Parker).

NATIONAL BEAT

Company reaches voting milestone

CHARLOTTE -- After more than two years of voting, America's longest-running election reached a milestone Monday, Sept. 1, but the voting will go on.

Monday marked the date established in 1982 by the Justice Department for the local Bell operating companies to have in place "equal access" to long-distance companies for most of their customers. Equal access means that customers can reach their choice of a long-distance company by simply dialing 1, plus an area code and number, as they have always done with AT&T.

Although Bell operating companies -- like Southern Bell -- will honor that date, the process will continue, and customers will forever have the right to choose their preferred carrier.

Ever since the breakup of the Bell system, customers have been asked to choose a long-distance company for calls out of their area. Customers have had to select their favorite from a field of 475 companies nationwide.

Here in North Carolina, there are more than a dozen long-distance companies competing for customers. Since equal access conversions began, about 70 percent of all telephone customers in Southern Bell territory in North Carolina have been given the opportunity to make a choice.

AT&T has surprised industry analysts by garnering three out of every four votes cast in this election.

By lowering rates for out-of-state long-distance calls by more than 21 percent in the past two years and launching an extensive marketing campaign to win customers, AT&T has become an aggressive competitor in an extremely competitive market.

"AT&T is pleased that consumers have made the 'right choice' in the balloting and have voted for AT&T," said John Foster, vice president in charge of sales for AT&T's Southern Region. "More importantly, con-

sumers chose AT&T in a completely competitive marketplace. With the Justice Department's original deadline approaching, there are no longer any reasons for anything less than full and equal competition for all long-distance companies," Foster said.

Foster points to the fact that AT&T remains the only fully regulated long-distance company. And, although AT&T has made great strides in bringing to customers the benefits of competition, like innovative new services and lower long-distance rates, future customer benefits depend upon AT&T's ability to fully compete with other providers of long-distance services.

"Needless to say, it will be difficult for us to continue to bring new services to our customers on a timely basis if we are tied to outdated and unnecessary regulatory practices," Foster said. "Now that equal access is available throughout most of the country for all competitors, the time has come for AT&T to be allowed to compete equally. When you consider that AT&T is competing with hundreds of other companies, many which are large and powerful, it makes little sense for AT&T alone to be subject to regulatory constraint."

Among new services AT&T has introduced during the election period:

- Reach Out America -- a plan allowing customers to buy long-distance service in volume at a reduced rate. A special discount is also available with this plan.

- AT&T Opportunity Calling -- similar to a frequent flier pro-

gram, this offering awards discounts on name-brand goods and services based upon the amount of AT&T long-distance service used by customers.

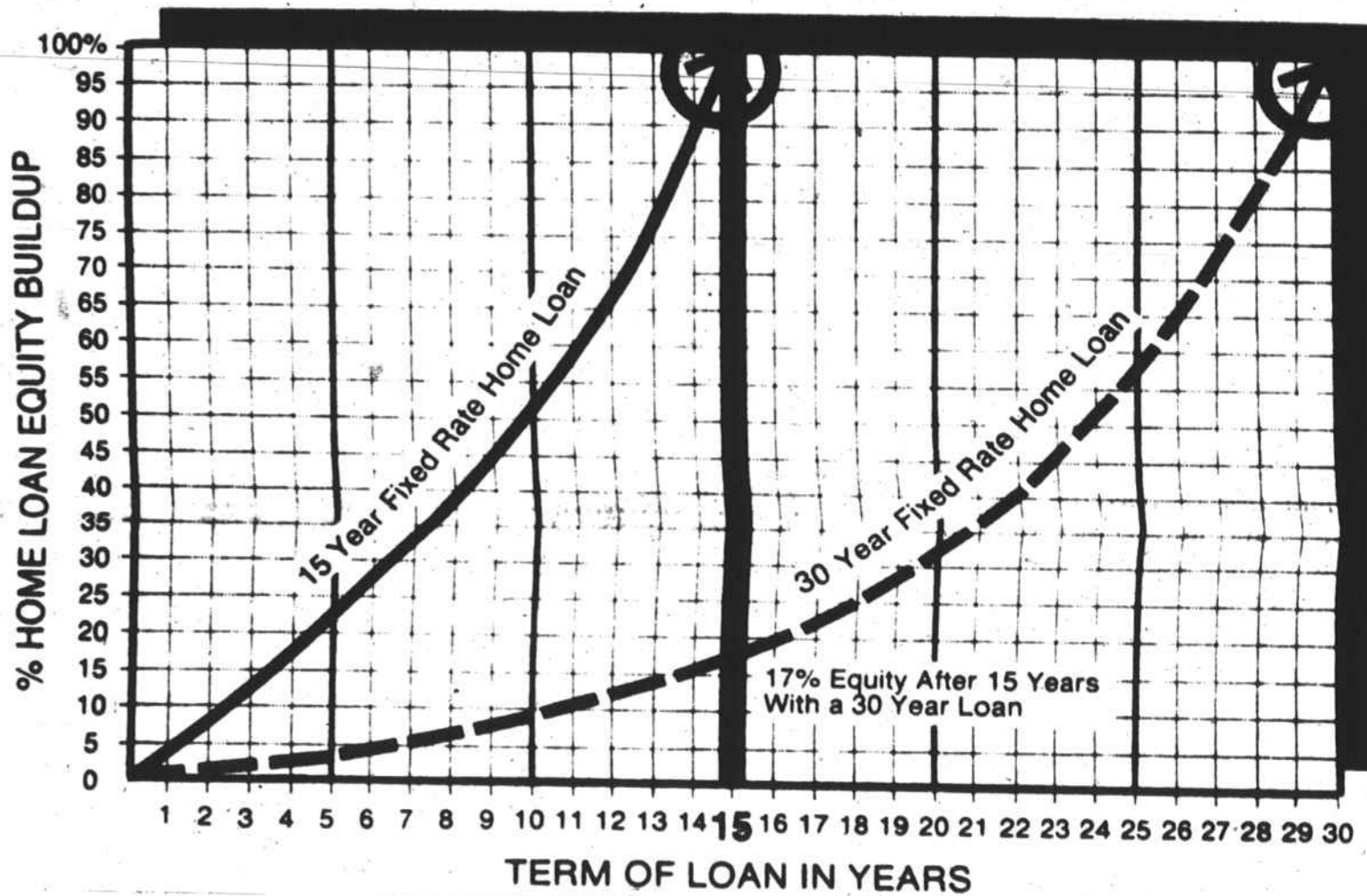
- AT&T Pro America -- an opportunity for large users of long-distance service to purchase an additional discount, applicable at any time, day or night.

It is apparent that while some analysts expected price alone to be the major issue in the selection process, consumers were more concerned with quality and the services provided by the long-distance companies. That trend is certain to continue, with the difference in prices between all companies becoming extremely narrow.

Although important as an indicator of the availability of equal access for long-distance companies and the opportunity for customers to have a choice of companies, the Sept. 1 milestone does not mean an end to the election process.

In the coming years, local telephone companies will convert smaller exchanges to equal access as they upgrade older switching equipment. Twenty percent of the U.S. population moves annually and will need to make a decision on long-distance service. And there will be new customers subscribing to telephone service for the first time who will also make a choice.

- In addition, consumers will always be able to change their minds on their long-distance companies, as they do with the suppliers of other products and services.



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