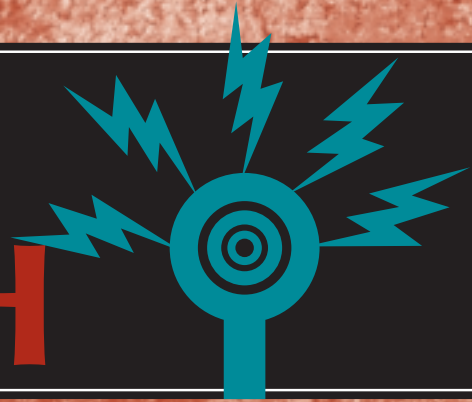


DEMERS DISPATCH



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What's So "Alternative" About Alternative?

As the leading indicator of "what's new" in the world of Rock and Pop music, Alternative has long been the format most associated with breaking artists and developing fresh musical trends. Being the pioneer in these areas, Alternative has also faced the challenge of seeing artists that were once considered "exclusive" or "core" to the format being shared with a wider variety of competitors.

Throughout the mid to late Nineties, there were still enough emerging sounds to give many PDs the opportunity to maintain a unique sonic signature. However, with the growth of Hot AC on one end and Active Rock on the other, programmers who have sought to maintain a uniquely Alternative musical position have been greatly challenged over the past decade.

Recently, many Alternative programmers have expressed the concern that this uniqueness may be eroding. Some have turned back the clock in an effort to seek out the "roots" of Alternative and pair that up with newer music that matches the raw passion of the format's earliest days. Others have opted for a more mainstream path musically, seeking to drive the station's Alternative sensibilities through other aspects of the programming package – notably personality and imaging.

So where does Alternative stand today? Is there such a thing as a "typical" Alternative radio station?

FORMAT ARCHITECTURE - 2004

While there is great range in the way programmers deploy the music on Alternative stations, we can pull together a composite of what an average station looks like on paper. In order to get at this format architecture, we've reviewed a sample of

more than forty Alternative stations across the country, within the Top 100 markets, all of which are currently Mediabase monitored stations.

Using two or more spins per week as a base criteria, we find a fairly broad range of 182 to 316 songs on Alternative playlists. On average, stations in the top 100 markets expose approximately 240 different songs at least twice per week.

ALTERNATIVE PLAYLIST RANGE 2004

	LOW	HIGH	AVG
Currents	26	66	39
Recurrents	14	58	32
Gold	92	242	170

The prototypical Alternative station is built on a base of about 170 Gold titles, 39 Currents and 32 Recurrents (using the Mediabase definitions for these categories). There is a great deal of playlist variance with song totals for Currents and Recurrents among Alternative stations. Currents range from a low of 26 to a top end of 66 titles (and this does not include special programming or single spins). The Recurrent diversity is equally dramatic, from a low of 14 up to 58 songs.

Even without the handful of so-called "Classic Alternative" stations figured in, rotational variance on Currents and Recurrents is extremely dramatic in the world of Alternative. Consider that, among our sample of stations in the larger markets, the ratio of spins by era ranges from an aggressive 78% Current/Recurrent to 22% Gold mix all the way down to a rather conservative 36% Current/Recurrent 64% Gold blend.

What's So "Alternative"

Highest spinning Currents generally get about six exposures per day, with totals in the low to mid 40s per week. Depending upon morning show, special programming etc., this range can vary from the low 30s to low 50s per week. Most stations have a Power Recurrent category of five to ten titles playing twice per day with the remainder of the Recurrents showing up once per day. Power Golds play in a day to day and a half range with lesser titles spinning two to three times per week.

Alternative stations on average play more songs per hour than their Active and Classic Rock competitors. Many stations in our sample average eleven or more songs per hour during non-drive time dayparts. Obviously, this gives these stations the ability to accommodate the higher rotations on Current product that are the trademark of many Alternative outlets.

FORMAT EVOLUTION – 1999-2003

Perhaps more than any other Rock-based format, Alternative stations depend on the "here and now" of contemporary music to develop their unique appeal. Like CHR, this also means that the format is more susceptible to the inevitable cycles of good or bad music during any given time frame.

Some Alternative programmers have voiced the concern that the format has become too "homogenized" and predictable in recent years. While that may be as simple as "Duh!" to many of you out there, we thought it wise to take a look at the data and see if that indeed is the case. For the following analysis, we compiled Mediabase monitored airplay encompassing the entire Alternative genre over the past five years – from 1999 to 2003.

ARTIST CONCENTRATION

Of the rock-based formats, Alternative has tended to be the most inviting to newer artists. However, those that make it to the top airplay levels do tend to dominate overall exposure. For example, the Top 15 most-played artists at Alternative who, in 1999, accounted for a little more than a quarter of all spins, are knocking on the door of providing nearly a third of all format airplay as of 2003.

ALTERNATIVE ARTIST CONCENTRATION

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Top 15	26.7%	30.5%	29.1%	32.2%	31.0%
Top 25	39.7%	43.6%	42.6%	45.8%	43.8%
Top 50	61.6%	63.3%	65.1%	66.6%	66.2%
Top 100	79.3%	79.7%	82.2%	84.4%	84.1%
Top 150	87.4%	87.4%	89.4%	90.8%	90.6%

The Top 25 accounted for about 44% of all airplay at the format last year and, among the Top 50, airplay levels have also increased to the point where these artists now account for about two-thirds of Alternative spins. There has definitely been a subtle narrowing of the format in terms of artist focus, with airplay concentration of the major acts increasing approximately 5% over the past five years.

FORMAT COMPONENTS

In order to gain a better understanding of how Alternative has evolved over the past several years, we wanted to break the format down into its basic building blocks. To drive the analysis, we wanted a sample base large enough to give us a good overview of the format. Using the Artist Concentration information, we settled on using airplay data from the Top 150 most-played artists at Alternative. These artists account for more than 90% of all airplay at the format across all Mediabase monitored stations.

As we reviewed the wide variety of Sound Styles that populate the diverse world of Alternative, we began focusing on building coalitions of similar styles. Through this analysis, three key building blocks of the format emerge – **Alternative Focus**, **Active Focus** and **Crossover**.

Alternative Focus is built on a large grouping of Sound Styles that have their roots in the format and are still generally perceived as being the central core of Alternative stations. Active Focus consists of those artists who may have had their beginnings at Alternative but who are now clearly most

About Alternative?

associated with Active Rock. Crossover is actually a very large single Sound Style that has grown to become an important format component. It is based on artists who are every bit as much at home on any contemporary Rock station's playlist.

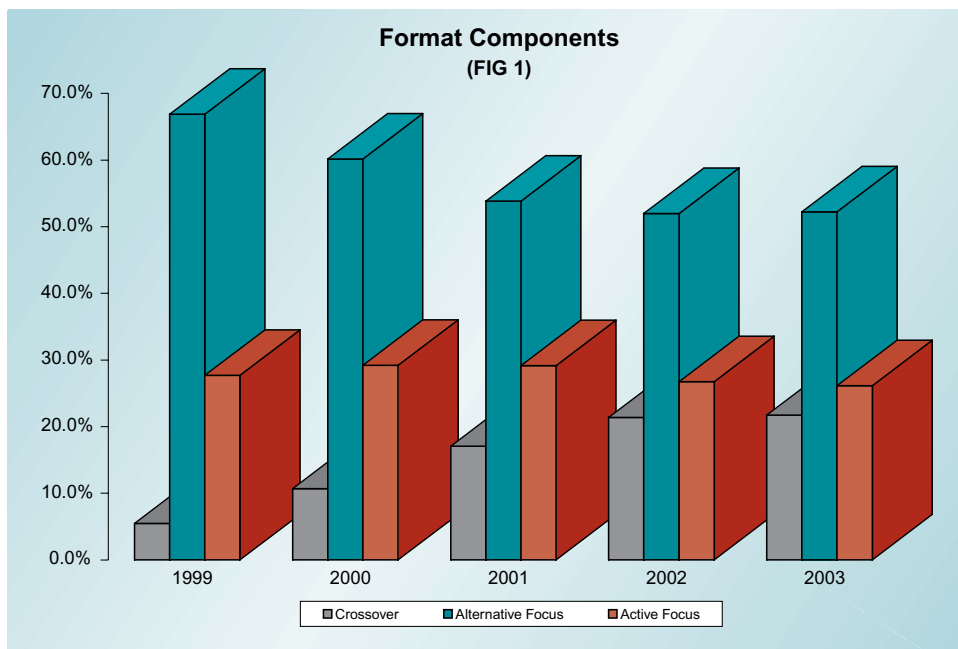
The Format Components chart (FIG 1) tells the big story. Alternative is most certainly a format that has

Over the same period of time, the Active Focus component (made up of Act Core, Grunge and Extreme Sound Styles) has accounted for just a little better than a quarter of all spins at Alternative. The net change from 1999 to 2003 is a loss of 1.6%.

The Crossover format component (really one Sound Style beginning with Creed and carrying through the likes of Staind and Nickelback) is driving Alternative to the middle ground now shared with Active Rock. In 1999, Alternative stations were still dealing with the evolution of the Pop side of the format and the loss of former core artists to Hot AC.

Since that time, there has been tremendous growth among this breed of Crossover rockers who have found a home at both Alternative and Active Rock (as well as spawning the more than occasional CHR hit). Crossover has grown from a minor Sound Style in 1999, accounting for 5.5% of

all spins, to a key building block of Alternative. As the Alternative Focus component declined from two-thirds to about half of all airplay, Crossover grew to account for nearly 22% of the spins at the format in both 2002 and 2003.



undergone a fairly dramatic transition over the past five years. It has moved from having a relatively unique base sound driven by the Alternative Focus component into more of a hybrid of the three key Format Components.

This shift is not a matter of Alternative taking on more of an Active focus. Artists whose roots are in Active Rock have remained a relatively static component of Alternative over the past five years. Rather it is the tradeoff between the Alternative Focus and Crossover that shows the format moving more toward a center lane of shared musical styles.

In 1999, the Alternative Focus component (a cluster of Alt Core, Pop, Punk, Rap Rock, Techno and Retro Sound Styles), accounted for more than two-thirds of all airplay at the format. That component moved into decline in 2000 and has settled in to just a bit better than half of all Alternative airplay last year.

SOUND STYLES

While the impact of Crossover cannot be denied, Alternative has also managed to lose ownership of some other key styles along the way. In the late nineties, Alternative stations began to lose hold of an astonishing number of acts that have become the core artists for Hot AC. At the same time, Alternative's commitment to "new is better" also led to the diminution of another key Sound Style, Grunge.

The diminishing association of Grunge with Alternative led us to include that Sound Style under

the Active Focus heading (FIG 2). Grunge maintains about 15% of total airplay at Active Rock these days but its impact on Alternative continues to decline.

Stripes et al) has shown a healthy resurgence over the past couple of years. The influx of strong new artists, as well as big releases from core acts have helped propel this style to its greatest significance since the late 90s.

The artist that most stands out in this regard is RHCP. The band has remained extremely strong over the past half decade, ranking third, first, fourth, first and second respectively from 1999 through 2003 in overall airplay at the format. No other artist even comes close to this staying power. Only Metallica at Active Rock shows anywhere near the same kind of endurance over the past several years.

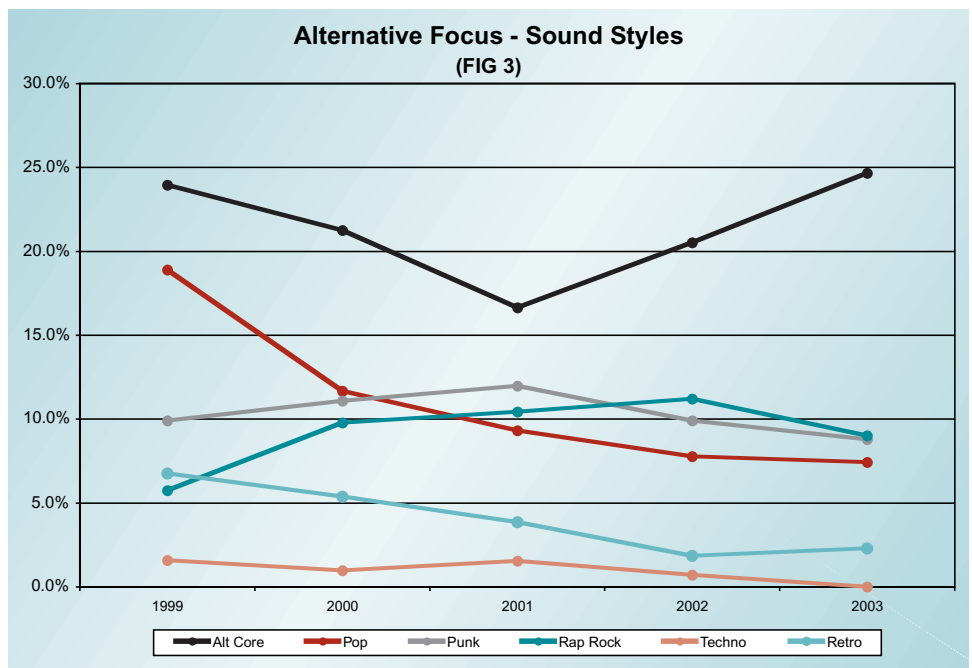
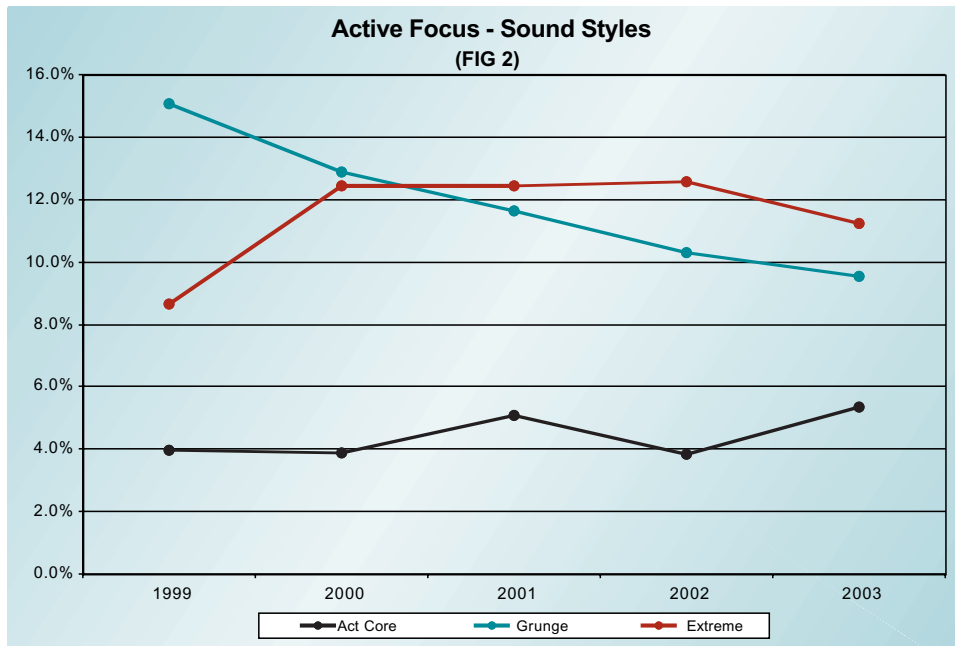
The biggest decline among Alternative Focus Sound Styles has been Pop. As the Hot AC format continued to grow through the late 90s and into 2000, Alternative's adjustment means many Pop artists from that time (Counting Crows, the Lilith Fair movement) are no longer associated with the

Artists such as Nirvana, Soundgarden and STP remain important components of most Alternative stations' Gold libraries, but in 2003 all Grunge airplay fell below 10% as part of a five-year decline.

At the same time, other key Active Focus Sound Styles have pretty much leveled off at the format. Extreme (Godsmack, Disturbed, System of a Down etc.) airplay is slightly ahead of Grunge. The artists we have deemed Act Core (really Metallica and friends) have remained a small but steady component of Alternative airplay.

There is some good news within the Sound Styles that make up the Alternative Focus component of the format. (FIG 3) The style we call Alt Core (Red Hot Chili Peppers, Foo Fighters, White

Styles has been Pop. As the Hot AC format continued to grow through the late 90s and into 2000, Alternative's adjustment means many Pop artists from that time (Counting Crows, the Lilith Fair movement) are no longer associated with the



“Is there such a thing as a “typical” Alternative radio station?”

format. Even the success of such acts as the Dave Matthews Band and Coldplay have not been able to stem the declining tide of Pop music at the format.

As an important defining sound from the mid-90s, Punk (Green Day, Offspring, and Blink 182) has settled into a fairly consistent groove. This Sound Style has contributed roughly 10% of overall airplay since 1999. In particular, Green Day’s ability to pump out timely releases supports the profile of this sound within the format.

Rap Rock (Beastie Boys, Limp Bizkit, Linkin Park) really emerged with a lot of promise at the new millennium. However, the impact of this Sound Style has leveled off to nearly the identical airplay range as Punk. This is true now even though Linkin Park reigned as the most played artist at the format in 2003. Rap Rock has seen some decline over the past two years as Limp Bizkit’s star waned and the format waited for the Beastie Boys to come back. Once a key format differentiator, most Rap Rock artists are increasingly being shared with Active Rock.

Other smaller components have had their moments in the sun but the data shows these Sound Styles to be more footnotes than core sounds. Techno and related Dance Sound Styles (featuring music by artists such as Moby, Chemical Brothers and Fatboy Slim) have never really risen much above one or two hit wonder status, though they clearly influence many players who are perceived as being more mainstream to the format.

Another notable piece of data is the general decline in Retro across the format. Artists included here such as R.E.M., Jane’s Addiction and U2 constituted only a bit more than 6% of spins in 1999 and the figure is now roughly half that. As one might expect from such a contemporary-leaning format, most of those spins are relegated to specialty programs and features. With the relatively recent emergence of Classic or Classic-leaning Alternative stations in several markets, it will be interesting to track whether or not established Alternative stations react by increasing their reliance on this Sound Style.

ALTERNATIVE Most-Played Artists

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
1	PEARL JAM	RHCP	INCUBUS	RHCP	LINKIN PARK
2	OFFSPRING	LIMP BIZKIT	STAINED	PUDDLE/MUDD	RHCP
3	RHCP	BLINK 182	LINKIN PARK	INCUBUS	FOO FIGHTERS
4	CREED	STP	RHCP	LINKIN PARK	AUDIOSLAVE
5	STP	CREED	STP	SYSTEM/DOWN	NIRVANA
6	NIRVANA	PEARL JAM	BLINK 182	STAINED	STAINED
7	BEASTIE BOYS	GREEN DAY	LIMP BIZKIT	NIRVANA	CHEVELLE
8	SM PUMPKINS	FOO FIGHTERS	GREEN DAY	HOOBASTANK	TRAPT
9	BLINK 182	BUSH	PEARL JAM	JIMMY/WORLD	WHITE STRIPES
10	BUSH	SM PUMPKINS	NIRVANA	P.O.D.	STP

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"So where does Alternative stand today?"

Clearly, the impact of Crossover at Alternative has been a key factor in what some might consider the homogenization of the format. Still, there are other factors at play, including the challenge of trying to develop a fresh cadre of core artists for the format every few years – a daunting (and unrealistic) challenge. After all, no radio format, no matter how contemporary the focus, can always smell out the "next big thing." And what if that "next big thing" has little to do with your world? (Can you say Hip-Hop?)

Consider the movement among the Top 10 most-played artists at Alternative over the past five years. It appears that as the format evolves, the rate of change is accelerating. For example, 7 of the 10 most-played in 1999 survive and make the same list in the year 2000. By 2002, only half come back from the previous year and that is repeated in '03. When you look at the entire five-year span, only one artist (RHCP) makes the list every year and only two additional bands (Nirvana and STP) were among the Top 10 in both 1999 and 2003.

By 2001, you can see newer Crossover acts emerging into the top echelon of airplay. In the following year, you have perhaps the most diverse Sound Style map with artists representing Extreme, Pop and Rap Rock driving a tremendous amount of format airplay. Finally, in 2003, you see an awful lot of guitars and Crossover rock among the Top 10.

Alternative has always had a base in both of the broad genres of Rock and Pop. As these worlds also continue to fragment, Alternative has, at times, tried

to embrace a wider variety of music styles to maintain its image as THE format for New Music. Over time, this has led to playlists that include everyone from Eminem to Drowning Pool to Sarah McLachlan.

At the moment, Alternative appears to be leaning hard into the mainstream at a time when the format faces increasing competition from new media. This is a particular threat to the format since these new delivery mechanisms will likely count members of the younger end of the Alternative target as early adopters of their technology.

Alternative also faces the prospect of competing with fresh Programming approaches from traditional radio, such as the 80s-based invaders from Canada (Jack, Bob and friends) that are co-opting some of Alternative's trademark attitudes and stationality.

After all, the challenges facing Alternative stations are just as much about personality and stationality as they are about music. Programmers need to be especially attentive to building products that are far more than Alternative jukeboxes. But the music is a powerful piece and it often sparks the creativity that drives those other elements of a station's presentation.

This would appear to be a time for programmers to reassess just what it means to be "Alternative" in a world where their station may be perceived as "old school" by some of its listeners and "too cutting edge" by others.

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Alex DeMers, President
Jeff Murphy, Media Consultant
Peter Smith, Media Consultant

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Sean Hoots, Webmaster
Cheryl Wolf, Office Manager
Judy Haupt, Business Manager

PA OFFICE: 204 Exton Commons, Exton, PA 19341 • 610.363.2636 • Fax: 610.363.2198
TX OFFICE: 12416 Hymeadow Dr., #219, Austin, TX 78750 • 512.407.9299 • Fax: 512.407.9297

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