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Low-power radio stations catering to local listeners try to make themselves heard



KLBP in Long Beach is among low-wattage stations trying to fill a void in locally created programming. (Credit: Sensay via Getty.)



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A growing number of independent community stations are rising up to serve local audiences at a time when the larger, corporate-owned stations are airing the same content shared among numerous stations around the country.

Licensed as “low-power FM” stations, they are usually running between 10 and 1,000 watts, a far cry from the power allowed for most commercial stations. Further limiting the signal, at least locally where there are few open frequencies available, the stations are often assigned to frequencies already assigned to other, albeit distant, full-power FM stations. For example, San Pedro’s KCLA (100.7 FM) has to fight the signal that shoots up the coast from San Diego’s KFBC, a station so powerful that on clear days, it can be received in San Pedro as well as most L.A. stations.

But these stations fill an important void left when the big boys stopped caring about local content, though the goals have not always come to fruition. It’s not easy — like public stations, they are unable to sell official advertisements, though sponsorships are allowed. This limits revenue sources and thus forces a station to rely on fundraising and donations.

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Case in point: KLBP/Long Beach, which broadcasts on the same frequency as the powerful KGGI/Riverside: 99.1 FM. Perhaps that's why you may not have heard of it. The station has been on the air since 2016 and recently had a full change to the governing board members and the organization.

The "new" KLBP is not ready to launch officially — station managers are calling it a "soft launch." Recent improvements include a more predictable music format during most of the day, differing by the day, and special programming at night and weekends.

For example, Mondays focus on metal and rock; Tuesdays on blues; Wednesdays on classic and alternative rock; Thursdays focus "a bit" on hip-hop; Fridays on electronic, world, and interestingly adult album rock; Saturdays on oldies, rock and reggae; and Sundays on everything else. You can even find new music from local and established bands daily, something management hopes to expand on in the future.

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The management team includes Danny Lemos, a longtime supporter of Long Beach radio after making a name for himself working with Rick Dees. In addition to being the voice of "Chuy from La Puente" on Dees' show, Lemos worked a multitude of positions at various stations, including promotions, music, programming and traffic. He's also a stand-up comic, writer, producer, and talk-show host.

Before helping reorganize KLBP, he was the advisor to Cal State University Long Beach's student-run campus radio station, originally called K-Beach and now called "22-West Radio."

While Lemos oversees and directs the entire operation, there are others playing important roles. Kris Kosach is the music director charged with — and excited about — making the station an outlet for new music. Kosach has a long history with music, working on alternative music radio stations as well as being one of the first VJs at MTV-2. Michael Stark, my old podcast partner, is running his popular L.A. Radio Sessions at 10 a.m. on Sundays.

Like many low-powered FMs, no position is paid as the station just doesn't have the funds, so it's a labor of love for those involved.

According to Stark, the station is currently working on a special fundraising event designed to complement the official re-launch in March, and a new app is expected "in the next few weeks."

"We have received so much support from the Long Beach community," added Lemos. "And we are just beginning!"

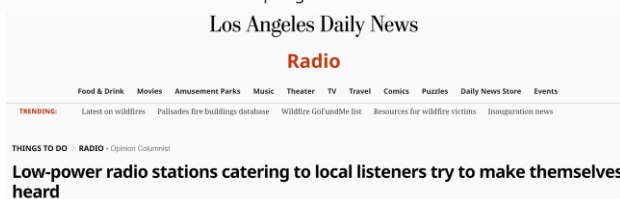
Expect numerous community events and co-sponsored tie-ins with local businesses and community organizations.

SEE ALSO: [How Rodney Allen Rippey brought back the 'Beautiful Music' radio format](#)

Kosach is excited about KLBP's musical potential. "Our strategy for music is to completely disrupt the model by flipping music programming on its head," she said. "It's entirely backward. So whereas you might only hear local artists late on Sunday night, you'll hear them and heavy rotation on KLBP in between some of the edgiest new music catching on around the US and the globe.

"You'll also hear songs that L.A. grew up with, but that don't get airplay, such as TSOL or Pennywise. And then there are the genres that no one else has the guts to play. We have the only ongoing Goth radio show in L.A., as well as an hour devoted to deep cuts of Metal and another that's entirely the new genre of Screamo. Yep, that's a thing and only KLBP has it."

Find out more and listen online at klbp.org.



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