

CRS '24 DAILY BUZZ

March 1, 2024, Issue 3

Powered by Country Aircheck



Study Haul: Personalities

Smith Geiger's **Andrew Finlayson** offered three takeaways during the "CRS Research Presentation" Thursday (2/29). Subtitled "But They Have A Great Personality," the survey of 800+ country listeners first asked, "How are you listening to country music?" Streaming led with 65%, followed by terrestrial radio (60%) and YouTube/websites (46%). Social media tied with owned media (19%) ahead of satellite radio (14%). Asking why radio remains strong in the face of numerous competitors, Finlayson pointed to convenience, connection and conversation. "Radio is a big easy button," he said. "You need to take advantage of that."

Respondents' "essential elements" for an on-air personality included being a "real person, not a bot" (66%), "authentic" (60%), "makes me feel good" (53%) and "introduces me to new country music" (52%). The least essential elements were "politics that match mine" (20%), "local to my area" (27%) and "patriotic" (28%).

Listeners prefer personalities who feel authentic even if they're not always polished by a wide margin (86%), prefer personalities who share stories about the music (73%) and like a casual approach (68%) over "putting on a show." "Less polish, more real," Finlayson said. "This is what we're hearing from your listeners." Noting that 63% prefer personalities who never talk about their values or politics, he added, "Be an escape from the news."

The study also played audio clips for respondents, gleaned further insight into preferences for a lighter mood and a focus on the music. In summation, Finlayson's key points were:

- 1. Authenticity:** Real over polished.
- 2. Escapism:** Be positive and lighten listeners' mood.
- 3. Music:** Be a friend who makes listeners feel smarter about the music they love.



Piece Of Mind: The Records Nashville team celebrates their inaugural No. 1, **George Birge's** "Mind On You." Pictured (l-r) are Country Aircheck's **Addie Morton** and **Chuck Aly**, the label's **Helena Akhtar**, Country Aircheck's **April Johnson**, the label's **Josh Easler**, **Jamice Jennings** and **Barry Weiss**, Birge, Country Aircheck's **Lon Helton** and the label's **David Bubba Berry**.

"Country radio has the power of authenticity in a world of algorithms and AI," Finlayson says. "And that's what's going to keep you all going."

The full session and presentation deck is expected to be posted for CRS attendees at some point.

—Chuck Aly

AI Less Feared, More Embraced

At last year's CRS, a hastily assembled panel on artificial intelligence (AI) found that the radio industry had a largely negative reaction to the idea of the burgeoning technology being used there. This year, when no less than four

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panels at CRS are specifically focused on AI, the industry's tune is changing.

At yesterday's (2/29) "AI Interactive Town Hall" session, Moxie Media Principal **Zena Burns** conducted a live poll of the audience via text messaging, asking which word best describes how they feel about AI in their profession: excited, fearful, suspicious or welcoming. While nearly 41% chose "suspicious," "excited" was close behind, garnering 35% of the vote.

Alpha Media's **Phil Becker**, who was in the audience both years, said, "The temperature in this room has changed dramatically from a year ago." Noting the industry's hostile reaction to Alpha's introduction of the "AI Ashley" personality on one of its stations last year, Becker said, "Our industry has been tricking people since the beginning. We hire voice actors to replicate listener calls, we send roses to people who aren't in relationships, but for some reason an AI DJ is our line in the sand?" Futuri Media's **Scott Lindy** also noted that the comments in yesterday's session were "night and day from last year."

Burns and other panelists stressed that now is the time to be experimenting with AI. Even if you've tried it before and not been happy with the results, she said, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." She offered a list of 13 ways AI can be useful, including taking notes and summarizing meetings, making email campaigns more effective, and reworking one piece of content for different platforms. Burns put together a Linktree for CRS attendees of AI-related resources. (Find it [here](#).)

Lindy noted that AI is "not plug and play ... it is only as good as how you manipulate it." But, he stressed, "Diving in right now" to get comfortable with the technology is "critical, even if it's not giving you exactly what you want."

The panelists walked through the audience with microphones asking attendees to share ways they're using AI. Responses ranged from creating spec ads to creating "holiday bad Santa sweepers." After Toby Keith's death, one person said he asked AI to create an image of the singer on a winged horse in heaven, and it got plenty of likes and shares on social media. Another person said that for his station's "Grab Your Grover" \$1,000 bill giveaway contest, he successfully had AI create an image of Pres. Grover Cleveland "dancing with confetti." Another audience member joked that he uses ChatGPT so often for tasks, "I have no critical thinking skills of my own anymore."

Burns did offer one note of caution, which is that "when you put anything in ChatGPT, it becomes public knowledge." She suggested redacting some details for anything proprietary.

—Phyllis Stark

Story Swap: Lainey & Trisha

During a warm Q&A at CRS yesterday (2/29), **Lainey Wilson** and **Trisha Yearwood** discovered they've shared similar professional experiences. Their comparing of notes made for a fun, spirited dialogue between interviewer Yearwood and rising artist Wilson.

The funniest moments came when both shared one bad piece of advice they received early in their careers, and one horror story from their first radio tours.

Lainey was once told by an advisor that she needed to be either an artist or a songwriter. "For a minute I almost believed it," she admitted, "but I wasn't having it." Yearwood said she was told early on that she wasn't a songwriter, and "allowed that to be my truth for a long time."

As for their radio tour stories, Yearwood recalled walking out of an interview when the DJ brought up an inflammatory, fake *National Enquirer* story, despite the station presenting her concert that night. Wilson once brought a guitar into a station while promoting her first single, only to be told by the PD that she should have left the instrument in the car, because he didn't want to hear her play. After listening to the single ("Dirty Looks") twice on ancient speakers, the PD told her, "Lainey, you're just not that good." She joked that she hoped he was in the room at CRS.

In a now well-known story, Wilson talked about grinding in Nashville for 10 years before her first chart-topper. Yearwood's grind lasted six years before her first hit, and she sympathized when Wilson compared the whirlwind first couple of years since her own breakthrough hit to "being drug behind a ski boat for years until you get your legs under you."

Both admitted to having the kind of personality that makes them want to be liked, but Wilson said she's learned, "That people pleasing stuff has got to go ... I ain't got time for that." When Yearwood remarked that she was

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One Direction: The annual Northeast radio hang yesterday (2/28) at Luke's 32 Bridge.

glad Wilson learned that lesson young, Wilson replied, "I'm just saying it [out loud] to remind myself."

The desire to be liked can be damaging on social media, where cruelty abounds. Both artists said they've learned not to read comments on social posts for the sake of their mental health, with Yearwood explaining why: "If I post 'Good morning,' somebody will reply, 'It's not a good morning for me. I'm never buying your records again.'"

Later in the conversation, Yearwood shared that she was once described as "a singing stick" in a concert review, and also joked that these days, despite being "pretty easygoing, I'm 59 years old and will not take your shit."

When an audience member asked both what has surprised them the

most about stardom, Yearwood said, "It's how much time you spend not doing the thing you most wanted to do" – i.e. perform onstage. Wilson, meanwhile, noted that with all of her major accomplishments of the last few years, she's been most surprised that, "I don't feel any different ... I'm still always like, 'What's next.'"

–Phyllis Stark

Made Of Honor

Thursday's (2/29) "CRS Honors" covered a full range of emotions. There was excitement as Albright & O'Malley & Brenner's **Becky Brenner** announced, "Mentoring and Inspiring Women in Country Radio," a new program developed in partnership with **Mentoring and Inspiring Women**

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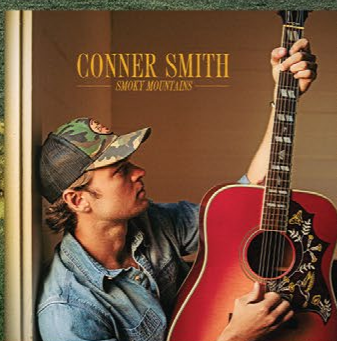


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(MIW) aimed at nurturing the next generation of industry professionals.

There was joy when an incredulous **Tim Leary** of WIRK/West Palm Beach said, "Wow, is this actually happening?" when being presented with the first of this week's two *Tom Rivers Humanitarian Awards*. "I'm honored and humbled and very grateful; thank you for allowing my family to be a part of this family," he added.

The mood took a somber turn as **The War And Treaty** took the stage and sang "When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder" as the names of colleagues who have passed since the last CRS were scrolled on screen.

Then back to anticipation and excitement as **Country Radio Hall of Fame (CRHoF)** Committee co-chair **Tim Roberts** unveiled the CRHoF class of 2024: **Cody Alan, Pat Still & Tom Malley, Mike Moore, Jim Robertson and Meg Stevens** (Breaking News 2/29).

The ceremony wrapped up with Boys & Girls Club National VP/Business & Community Affairs **Frank Sanchez** presenting the CRB Artist Humanitarian Award to **Kane Brown**. Awarded in large part due to his work with the organization, Brown was visibly choked up. "I can help them, but they help me because I can see myself in them," he said. "Just getting to hear the kids' stories and hearing the things that they go through, and knowing the Boys & Girls Club gives them a safe place, it makes it mean even more to me." —Chris Huff



Tennessee Pink: Columbia's **Megan Moroney** at Sony's *Girls' Night Out*. Pictured (l-r) are *Nights with Elaina's* **Jackie Stevens**, the label's **Paige Elliott**, *Nights with Elaina's* **Elaina Smith**, the label's **Anna Widmer**, Solid Entertainment **Kimsey Kerr**, Moroney, the label's **Lauren Thomas**, Westwood One's **Becky Bennett**, the label's **Christy Garbinski**, WUSN/Chicago's **Marci Braun**, the label's **Lisa Owen** and Audacy's **Sabrina Sergio**.

The War And Treat

If there's a lack of diversity in country music, explain the chicken gyro in the boxed lunch at yesterday's (2/29) *Team UMG* at the Ryman. But also, the lineup, which boasted an impressive 16 acts with varied styles and sounds, from different backgrounds and at different stages of their careers and lives, coming together to play alongside a symphony of crinkling chip bags and clapping.

The theme of the day was debuting new music, or "the label is going to kill me for not playing the single." **Tyler Hubbard**, who host **Lon Helton** joked writes more hit songs in a week than Cadillac Jack has

had jobs, opted for "Real Life Heroes," and **Chris Stapleton**, **The War And Treaty** and **Parker McCollum** played "Mountains Of My Mind," "Stealing A Kiss" and "Big Ole Fancy House," respectively.

Despite **Michael Trotter Jr.** running on an empty stomach, and no, "salad isn't food," The War and Treaty managed to earn the first standing ovation. Trading off scene-stealing high notes, Trotter Jr. called wife **Tanya** a show-off, to which she sang, "Ain't my fault you ate a salad."

Luke Bryan, recovering from 22 vodkas at Jason Aldean's birthday dinner, played "Love You, Miss You, Mean It" for the first time and "Cowboys And Plowboys," with **Jon Pardi**, for the second time. Watching Bryan attempt to tune his guitar, Pardi asked someone to send a video to ABC's *American Idol* with the note "This is a judge?"

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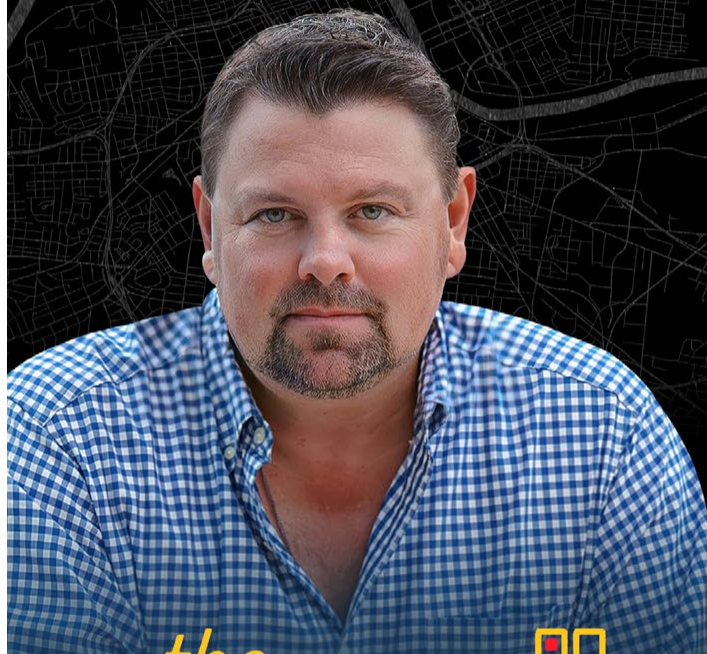
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Making their CRS debuts, **Anne Wilson** sang "Rain In The Rearview" and **Hueston** performed "It Wasn't The Bottle." "That's how much this music stuff means to me," Hueston, whose son was born *two nights ago*, said of his appearance. Ahead of the release of his self-titled debut album (3/8), **Luke Grimes** played opening track "Burn," following **Priscilla Block's** "Good On You" and **Dalton Dover's** "Bury Me In This Bar."

Additional performers included **Sam Hunt** ("Outskirts"), **Darius Rucker** ("Never Been Over"), **Brothers Osborne** ("Break Mine"), **Kassi Ashton** ("Called Crazy") and **Keith Urban**, who closed the luncheon with new single "Messed Up As Me" and "Wasted Time," the latter of which had a little crowd participation twist. Capitol mainstays Rucker and Urban both expressed their gratitude for their label home. "I've been with a shitty label," said Rucker, who is celebrating his 17th year in Nashville. "It's great to be with a good one."
—Caitlin DeForest

Try Fright Zone

"I try to do one thing every day that scares me," confessed Leo33's **Katie Dean**, who proceeded to mention her recent attempt at skateboarding. Her recent career pivot was just one example in Thursday's (2/29) "Here I Grow Again On My Own: Step Out Of Your Comfort Zone" panel. Moderated by KFRG/Riverside's **Heather Froglear**, all three panelists shared the thoughts and fears behind major career pivots.

Talent coach/consultant **Steve Reynolds**, who passed out discounted post-Valentine candy to help liven up the after-lunch crowd, said he would always ask himself, "What's the worst that can happen?" before taking on a new opportunity. And artist-turned radio host-turned minister **Granger Smith** compared the need for praise as an artist to nicotine addiction. "I felt it might be really bad for me, so when I quit that habit of needing that praise, I was surprised that just like quitting nicotine, eventually, my lungs cleared up and I didn't need it."
—Chris Huff

Remote Control

"Take all the chairs away." Not the overriding theme, but a passionate plea from KWJJ/Portland, OR's **Nick Steele**, when asked what simple things could be done to improve remote broadcasts. Moderated by Albright & O'Malley & Brenner's **Kenny Jay**, "Your Remote Sucks! Let's Fix It!" did focus on more substantial issues. iHeartMedia's **Kristy Beebe** said that before anything else, there needed to be a reason for listeners to be out. "People don't have the time they once did to just stop by a remote."

KAJA & KASE/Austin's **Alek Halverson** offered simple and economical tips, like hand-out cards that include a QR code linked to the station stream. All three panelists agreed that so-called "digital remotes," with pre-recorded videos from locations and social media posts, are a no-brainer. "We're all wearing 17 hats these days," reasoned Halverson. "We don't have the time to just sit somewhere for two hours and hope somebody comes by." Beebe was quick to add that personality is still crucial in a digital world, "anytime you add in a talent relation with a client, it's harder for the client to say no."
—Chris Huff

Mentoring Matters

At a Thursday (2/29) CRS session on mentoring, panelists from radio, labels and artist management stressed the importance of developing the industry's next generation. Cox Media Group/Tulsa VP/GM **Mark Schecterle** explained, "Our industry continues to get smaller, and it's important to give back ... We need the up-and-comers to be in our shoes one day." But giving back can also mean getting back. Schecterle added, "As a mentor, you can learn from your mentee. We never stop learning."

Warner Music Nashville VP/Radio **Anna Cage** said "the onus is on you" if you want to find a mentor, but offered one solid suggestion for doing so. "The trades are good for that," she said of publications like **Country Aircheck**. If you see a career move happen with someone you're interested in being mentored by, and the story says "congratulate them here," she suggested, reach out and start a dialog.
—Phyllis Stark

Branding, Not Ego

During CRS Thursday's (2/29) "Personal Branding: It's Not Ego, It's Branding" session, moderator **Jennie Smythe**, CEO of Girilla Marketing, talked social media presentation and understanding the ins and outs of

digital platforms with iHeartMedia's **Brooke Taylor** and WME's **Sloane Cavitt Logue**. Bridging the gap between "influencer" and "musician," Logue suggested that blending the two is not a negative thing for an artist's brand.

Discussing the topic of taking content from on-air to online, Taylor emphasized how translating on-air content into visual and engaging online will then bring people back to listening. When it comes to selling yourself as an influencer, "be who you know how to be" was the common theme. Particularly when monetizing a following, Taylor said, "You work as hard as you want it ... You never know where a conversation's gonna go. Putting yourself out there and having a media kit is huge." —Gideon Dean

The Day Ahead

Friday, 3/1

8:00am-6:30 pm (closed noon-1:30 pm)
Registration open

Omni, Level 2, Broadway Hallway

7:30-8:45am

Women's Networking Breakfast

Sponsored by Nuwoodoo Media Services
Abby Leigh, Athena Puharic, Blake Carter, Brooke Taylor, Charlene Bryant, Jessica "Carsen" Humphreville, Karina Farias-Day, Katie Dean, Katie McCartney, Krista Hayes, Laura Hostelley, Melissa Quinones, Mia McNeal, Michelle Tigard Kammerer, Sarah Kay, Zena Burns
Omni, Level 3, Cumberland Rooms 5&6

8-11:40am

Workshop Alley

Omni, Level 3, Cumberland Rooms 1-3

Social Track

8-8:50am Social Media Videos (Brent Michaels)

9-9:50am Your Social Hook (Krista Horton)

11-11:50am Monetizing Your Socials (Gabe Mercer)

Imaging/Production Track

8-8:50am AI In Imaging (Bo Matthews)

9-9:50am Imaging Tips And Tricks (Cowboy Kyle)

11-11:50am Creating Effective Endorsement Spots (Kenny Jay)

Podcasting 101 Track

8-8:50am Podcasting Principles (Kevin Sokolnicki)

9-9:50am Promotional Strategies (Krista Hayes)

11-11:50am Exploring Creative Approaches ("Mike D" Deestro)

8:50-9:40am

Grand Theft Promo: The Best Bits To Steal

Sponsored by Promosuite

Lois Lewis, Marie Bradshaw, Ryan Scheinrock,

Stephanie Waford

Omni, Level 3, Cumberland Rooms 1 & 2

8:50-9:40am

On Air Personalities: The OG Influencers

Caroline Hobby, India Mayer, Kevin Manno, Ricki

Sanchez, Victoria Cappelli, Zac Woodward

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom A-C

8:50-9:40am

Diversi"tea": Spilling The Data On Inclusive Programming

Elaina Smith, Jada Watson, Jess Wright, Travis Moon

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom D-G

10-11:00am

Your Brain Is A Liar: Recognizing And Understanding The Impact Of Your Mental Health Featuring Jason Prinzo

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom D-G

11:10-11:40am

AI: Work Smarter, Not Harder

Bo Matthews, Joey Tack, Scott Lindy, Todd Zarnitz

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom D-G

11:10-11:40am

One Man Band: Tools For Today's Programmer

Brent Michaels, Dusty Panhorst, Giselle Boilling

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom A-C

11:10-11:40am

Howdy Partners: The Potential Of Great Partnerships

Bekah Digby, John Shomby, Scott Roddy, Shelley Hargis

Omni, Level 3, Cumberland Rooms 1 & 2

11:45am-12:00 pm

Pre-lunch Performance by Billie Jo Jones

Sponsored By Get Joe Records

Omni, Level 2, Broadway Hallway

12:00-1:50 pm

Lunch and Performance Sponsored By BMLG

Lady A, Mackenzie Carpenter, Jackson Dean, Riley

Green, Greytan James, Chris Janson, Brian Kelley,

Carly Pearce and other special guests

Omni, Level 2, Broadway Ballroom

2-2:50 pm

Unapologetically Unemployed

Carly Evans, Dan Mason, Marie LeMaitre, Monta Vaden

Omni, Level 3, Cumberland Rooms 1 & 2

2-2:50 pm

AI Chat GBT: The Good. The Bad. The Truth

Anna Chauvet, Ashley Elzinga, Charlie Cook, Heather Cohen

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom A-C

2-2:50 pm

Cycle of a Song: Megan Moroney's "Tennessee Orange"

Megan Moroney, Jackie Augustus, Juli Griffith, Liz Cost,

Steve Hodges, Taylor Lindsey

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom A-C

3-3:50 pm

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Ben Kline, Cindy Mabe, Cris Lacy, Jon Loba, Randy

Goodman, Sarah Trahern

Omni, Level 2, Legends Ballroom D-G

5:15-6:45 pm

New Faces Cocktail Reception

Sponsored by Futuri Media

Omni, Level 2, Broadway Hallway

6:30 pm

Red Street Records Hangover Cure (coffee and tea service)

Omni Lobby, Bongo Java

6:30-10:00 pm

New Faces Of Country Music Dinner & Performance

Sponsored by ACM and Charity Partner St. Jude

Children's Research Hospital

George Birge, Dillon Carmichael, Corey Kent, Megan

Moroney, Conner Smith

Omni, Level 2, Broadway Ballroom

10 pm

B-Dub Radio Suite Sounds

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Omni, Suite 1214

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