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THE DAILY ORANGE

SERIOUS RADIO

Streaming online, 'The Mark Zito Show' transitions to a national audience

By Kelina Imamura

Twelve minutes before the "soft opening" of "The Mark Zito Show," host and namesake Mark Zito stumbles into the Orange Television Network headquarters like Cosmo Kramer from "Seinfeld."

"I can't be saying this enough," Zito said on the air that first night. "This is a soft opening. This had to happen eventually. It won't be like this in a week."

Zito takes his place behind the microphone. He takes out his laptop and starts connecting this room, the show's new home, to the rest of the world.

He plugs in and throws a pair of oversized headphones onto his head.

It's only moments before the camera turns on and "The Mark Zito Show" team - Zito, producer Matt Dangelantonio and co-hosts Dan Siegel and Courtney Craig - goes live.

"Mark Zito's getting a little nervous," Siegel said before going on air.

"I don't get nervous," Zito replied. "I'm too good."

Zito is confident about his product, and now he has a reason to be. His radio show, now in its second official year, is broadcasting off the Hill to listeners in Daytona Beach, Fla., at the University of Maine and at George Mason University. Through self-promotion, persistence and determination, Zito has expanded his audience.

What began as just a Saturday afternoon show is now streaming live Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday on the Internet and OTN, from 10 p.m. until midnight.

"I don't know of anyone who is based in this market that's syndicated elsewhere," said Zito, a junior communication and rhetorical studies major. "It's possible that some stations are syndicated to Utica or something like that. But I don't know of anyone who is also on in Florida or Maine."

Beginning with podcasting in high school, Zito has been working on some version of his creation for years. The show, originally called "Mixtape with Mark," morphed into "The Mark Zito Show"



when Zito realized there was more to talk about than just play new music.

He first began interviewing girls asking them whatever he wanted to know, and now his blunt interview style translates to the celebrities he interviews for the current show - everyone from Gavin DeGraw and Sara Bareilles to "The Express" actor Dennis Quaid.

The show first aired on Saturdays last year on Z89, a campus radio station. However, there were numerous disagreements between Zito and the station which resulted in his 10-week suspension last year and ultimately his firing on Friday. During the first show on OTN, Zito called his former home a "communist regime."

"My main concern is I never want it to turn into a personal thing with somebody," Zito said. "Like I didn't get along with Z89, the organization and their views, but the people over there I like. I never wanted anything to be personal. Lots of times I wish you could break it down between Mark Zito and radio Mark Zito."

Alex Silverman, general manager at Z89, declined to comment.

But the freedom of being its own media entity and the support from OTN, and its general manager Andy Robinson, is a relief for the show's members. Even in the new, more intimate setting, the team is able to continue its success.

"Because we're doing it more often, it's made us work harder for the show because it has become something that's more important to us now," Craig said. "It's not just one day a week, it's something that we regularly do."

The show's biggest accomplishment, Zito said, was being the only radio show in the city to interview Sara Bareilles when she came last March. At the time, "Love Song" was the No. 5 song in the country. Also, Matt Wertz announced his major label signing for the first time on the show.

"I think why we're such a good fit - OTN and Mark - is that Mark is very passionate and creative and if there is a place to try and experiment and do different things that maybe haven't been done before, this is the place to try it and do it," Robinson said.

With an explosion of Internet media avenues and satellite radio, it's possible for anyone to record and broadcast their homemade content almost anywhere. But there is something different about Zito and his show.

"I think that his confidence and his ability to sort of recognize that he's got something here that might be marketable is very unique," Robinson said. "I think from a standpoint of how many colleges do this, there's probably some. As far as Mark is concerned, he's a very unique person, and he recognizes his talent and really wants to take himself to the next level."

For now, the expansion of "The Mark Zito Show" is limited to its affiliates. But Zito's drive to expand further is the passion that Robinson and his team admire.

"I know what I want to do," Zito said. "And I'm driven to do it. As egotistical as it may sound, I think it's important that when you're trying to do something that you really want to do, you honestly believe that no one can do it better than you in that one moment."

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