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**INDEPENDENT
OPERATORS
UNLEASHED**

**10 WAYS A PD
CAN MANAGE
THE MANAGER**

**ROY
EXPLAINS
GOOD
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**THE 2021
BEST
MANAGERS
IN RADIO**

CONTENT CREATOR

COMPASS MEDIA CEO PETER KOSANN

GOING
SINKING



NT

Compass Media CEO Peter Kosann

Compass Media CEO Peter Kosann believes the radio industry is facing a content crisis. COVID-19 certainly didn't help, as companies needed to focus on ways to survive, pushing investing in new talent and cultivating young stars down on the to-do list. Many operators simply don't have the resources to make all the investments to create unique and compelling content. And that's where Compass Media comes in, according to Kosann.



Compass/Sports VP/GM Michelle Salvatore and Peter Kosann. Salvatore was the company's first hire and oversees sports programming and West Coast production.

Radio Ink: How did you get started in radio?

Kosann: The radio industry has always been an industry of innovation and honor. During my days in college I would religiously read *Broadcast and Cable*, studying all the companies – New City Communications, Cox, Jacor, Infinity – admiring their content, community involvement, and ultimately how the shadow of the industry was bigger than its parts. It was an industry I aspired to be in.

My first step into the industry was in college, where I was the editor of the *Brown Daily Herald* and then ran WBRU. At the time it was a legendary Class B station in Providence. It occurred to me that I could aspire to own stations.

Radio Ink: How does someone go from running a class B to ownership?

Kosann: I never achieved it. My journey took me to Chase Broadcasting in Hartford, selling advertising at WTIC-AM & FM. Then the woman I worked for, Fran Sharp, was hired by Michael Bloomberg when he bought WNEW. From 1992-2000 I ran business development for media for Bloomberg, building up distribution for his radio network, TV network, and cable channel.

In 2000, I left Bloomberg because Michael Bloomberg was not going public – media wasn't his main focus. I joined Joel Hollander when Mel Karmazan picked him to run Westwood One. From 2000-2008 I worked my way up at Westwood One, running affiliate sales, programming, ad sales, to COO and CEO. During that period of time Westwood One was the dominant audio syndication company, with two macro divisions, Metro Networks and Westwood One. When Infinity, which became CBS, which became Viacom, decided to exit their equity position in Westwood One, it triggered a change of control in my contract and I left.

Radio Ink: What was it like working with Mike Bloomberg?

Kosann: Mike Bloomberg is uniquely dynamic and innovative. He was always kind to me and treated his employees well.

A quick story about Mike. I was running business development for him and we were taking a flight to Chicago to see WMAQ radio for a business breakfast. We got to the ticket counter, and his ticket was first class, but mine was coach. He tried to upgrade me to sit with him, and when there was no availability, he downgraded himself to sit in coach with me.

“Peter has been successful in any endeavor he has been involved with, going back to when he was first head of affiliations, then head of sales, and then ultimately taking the reins as CEO at Westwood One. He is one of the brightest, hardest-working individuals who ever worked with me and has an incredible business sense. He has created an amazing business with Compass from a zero base.”

Joel Hollander

“Peter is on a mission to create and distribute terrific content. He has built an amazing team to make that happen. He is known for being super smart and unflinchingly honest. I also know him to be incredibly loyal and of the highest integrity. I'm proud to have him as a trusted friend.”

Jeff Warshaw

CEO

Connoisseur Media



Raiders President Marc Badain, Peter Kosann, and Raiders CRO Mark Shearer in Las Vegas during the construction of Allegiant Stadium.

Radio Ink: You were working at Westwood One for a decade. What was the industry like during that time?

Kosann: I owe a debt of gratitude to Joel Hollander. He was wonderful to me, serving as a friend and mentor. He gave me a myriad of promotions in a very short time, and as a young person I took on quite a bit of responsibility. Westwood One at the pinnacle had about 2,500 employees.

I became a CEO of an NYSE company, which at the time was a multi-billion-dollar company, at the age of 35. While I was in my earlier 30s I became president of sales, overseeing Metro Networks and Westwood One. We were in charge of about \$660 million in annual sales – at the time, that was probably the largest sales job. It had an Infinity Broadcasting type of culture, which was a high-demand culture. During that time the industry was still viewed as a growth industry, so the budgeting process was fairly intense. One had to be fairly ingenious to constantly drive revenue.

Secondly, everything we did at Westwood One was big. You had Marv Albert and Boomer Esiason calling *Monday Night Football*. We had Charles Osgood, CBS Radio News, the Olympics, March Madness. We launched Bill O'Reilly and Dennis Miller into national

syndication. There was a period of time where we were syndicating a lot of the top talk shows. We had unique tie-ins with the Viacom properties; MTV, CMT, etc. We had a phenomenal roster of incredible content. It was all about gaining maximum distribution for the content and monetizing as well as we could in a culture of high accountability. Ninety-nine percent of my time there was wonderful.

Radio Ink: Talk about the end at Westwood in 2009.

Kosann: There was a change of control at Westwood One, and the board of directors at the time offered me an opportunity to stay, but it's similar to the Bill Parcells line: "If they're going to ask you to cook the meal, they should at least let you pick the groceries." I felt if I didn't have total control to chart the course at Westwood One, it didn't make sense to stay.

I had a noncompete in syndication and joined Connoisseur Media as COO, which was when the financial crisis hit. Initially our thesis was to make a lot of acquisitions. Jeff Warshaw, who is also a wonderful friend and mentor, was prudent in his acquisitions, and it made sense for me to go out on my own and start Compass Media Networks. My vision from inception when I left college was to build a com-

pany, but in 2009 the opportunity was to start a syndication company.

Radio Ink: How much of a risk did it feel like, and how did you get past that?

Kosann: As Malcolm Gladwell says, I had put my 10,000 hours in at that point, and felt that everything there was to know about syndication, I had experienced. I was confident in what could be accomplished. I also would do anything humanly possible to make sure it succeeded. I would exhaust every relationship I could to get us off the ground and running.

It certainly isn't for the faint of heart to start a company from scratch. My career is evidence of hard work and perseverance. Nevertheless, when you start a company in the middle of the worst financial crisis in the last 50 years, in a competitive industry, it's very hard. You find a way and plow through. People want to be helpful, and there's a lot of humility to starting your own business. There are endless stories of kindness and generosity from our affiliates, partners, advertisers, content providers, and that's how you do it.

Radio Ink: How did you come up with the name Compass Media?

Kosann: I am an intensely private person, and the story of Compass Media is

“Peter is a genius! A true radio visionary and innovator. His knowledge, commitment, and passion make everyone around him better. I’m blessed to have met and work with him.”

**DeDe McGuire
Syndicated Radio Host
Compass Media
Networks**

“There are no secrets to Peter’s success with Compass — he truly loves our business, commits to building strong and mutually beneficial partnerships, and operates with integrity always.”

**Erik Hellum
Townsquare Media**

not a story about me, but of we and us. From inception, my hope was our story wouldn’t be about Peter Kosann, it would be about a bigger platform — a company we built. Therefore we wanted a name that would epitomize that, as opposed to something that was personal to me. The name has no connection to me, but it implies a grandeur and a vision for growth.

Radio Ink: You must have seen a path to success. What was it?

Kosann: What we saw at the time was a content crisis brewing in the industry. What I saw before consolidation was that the industry was made great because of great content. Pre-consolidation, radio operators had the willingness and the budget to invest in great local content. You could go up and down the dial in any market and hear locally originated, highly promotable, exclusive, unique programming.

When consolidation came and took hold, what you saw was most operators cut local personalities. They were able to get away with doing that because they could take a music-first position. When PPM came in, it validated that. If you took a music-first position in PPM, you got rewarded in the ratings.

Compass Media has been in business about 13 years, and over that time we saw music becoming commoditized. Suddenly, operators who got along with a music-first approach could no longer get away with it. What’s gone on in the last five to seven years is competition for local ad dollars, primarily from Google and Facebook, plus the pandemic, and the commoditization of music, and now you have this content crisis in the industry. This crisis has become acute and more accelerated because of the pandemic, as the operators are tight on cash.

Enter Compass Media Networks. Our vision at the time was that syndication companies, like radio companies, had been consolidated. There used to be a lot more syndication companies at scale, like Jones Media, Dial Global, Westwood One, ABC, etc. They ultimately merged. When we launched in 2009, we saw a pathway to invest in originally produced content to proliferate

on the dial and give affiliates many more options. Our vision continues to be every genre, every daypart. That gives our affiliates a lot of choices, puts our money where our mouth is, and incubates more content.

Radio Ink: When you started making contact with people you know in the industry, was the success and growth built on the trust you had with them from your Westwood One days?

Kosann: The syndication business has three core functions: create content or partner with content providers, secure distribution, and sell advertising. Throughout my career I’ve spent a lot of time in all three areas. We know the roadmap of each area.

Ultimately, the hardest person to satisfy is us, because we need to bring value to all of our constituents. We need to be satisfied we can incubate a radio show and make it incredible, that we can go to affiliates and add value to their station lineup, and we can go to an advertiser and get them to support the show. If we can’t see in our mind’s eye a pathway to add value to all three, we don’t pull the trigger.

A tremendous amount of time is spent in the gym, working out. It’s all about the R&D that goes into how we’re going to make something work. It’s completely unproductive to launch a show into syndication that won’t be successful. It has an incredible impact on our credibility and our mousetrap. We take a lot of pride in the fact we have a hit ratio of about 95% of incubating programs and bringing them to the marketplace. It’s because our team knows what they’re doing. We have a Rolodex of affiliates, friends, and partners who coach us.

Radio Ink: How do you find a hit show?

Kosann: It’s incredibly hard. What local operators are faced with is they don’t have a lot of cash. My prediction is that over the next decade, the idea of being a music-first station is going to be very difficult to pull off. Music is becoming so ubiquitous and so commoditized that you have to have personalities. The bar for content creation is incredibly high.

If you look at the video business, they will spend a billion dollars annually on



Cast and crew of Anna & Raven at Connoisseur Media's Star 99 FM, the show's flagship in Connecticut. With the cast are VP/Affiliate Sales Nancy Abramson, Assoc. Dir./Affiliate Sales Liane Sousa, Peter Kosann, Connoisseur Media Connecticut VP/GM Kristin Okesson, and Connoisseur VP/Programming Keith Dakin.

original programming. If you look at terrestrial radio, you can fill in the blank – we sure aren't spending that. On the local level, if you ask what it should cost you to create a good local morning show, it depends on the marketplace. Around here, we have to spend about seven figures on a morning show. A dynamic, entertainment-based morning show is going to have one or multiple hosts, a cast and crew, producer, board op, consultant, marketing plan, promotional plan.

Pre-consolidation, years ago, it wasn't unusual that you would go to a cluster of stations, and they all would have morning shows. That would be akin to saying we can drive into any town now and a cluster of six stations is spending a minimum of \$6 million on their morning shows, let alone all the other dayparts. There's no way they can do that.

When we look at programming we want to launch, first, it has a track record of success. It has hosts who want to drive forward and have ambition. It passes our sniff test in terms of our committee here who opine on the program.

Then it's a question of, is the category receptive to the opportunity set? When we think about a piece of content, we try to anticipate what's going on in the marketplace.

For example, Tom Joyner announces his retirement, and we go looking for a solution to bring to the market. We identify DeDe McGuire. She had been a co-host with Doug Banks years ago. She understood syndication. She went to Dallas – Service Broadcasting President Hymen Childs and head of programming George Cook brought her down there. She demonstrated for several years she could win in a

top 10 market. They have an ensemble cast and a production team that understands how to win. They have a great consultant, and she's in the prime of her career. We see a category and pathway to make it successful. Fast-forward, she is now in over 55 markets in less than a year and a half. She has a shot at becoming one of the dominant morning shows in the category.

Radio Ink: Why do you believe that show resonates with the audience?

Kosann: It starts by having a unique personality who's relatable, credible, knows the craft, and is a winner. A support team and a marketplace that's receptive. You can always launch a show. Even if Moses doesn't part the sea in terms of distribution, you can wedge your way in. In this particular example, there was a market opportunity. With DeDe, we've been able



Lincoln Kennedy, former Raiders All-Pro lineman and current Raiders radio analyst, bear-hugs Peter Kosann on sideline of Raiders game at O.C. Stadium in Oakland.

to demonstrate success already in PPM and diary markets, all time zones, different ownership groups, etc.

Radio Ink: Why does *Free Beer & Hot Wings* work?

Kosann: It's worked for nearly 20 years. We got involved with them — they were one of our first shows, in 2009. They are a little unusual in that they're five hours of spoken word entertainment. They're becoming the dominant morning drive Rock show. They've been on WGRD for many years with over a 35 share. That show works because of timing, tempo, benchmarks, and relatability.

Radio Ink: What about *Anna & Raven*?

Kosann: They are an example of one way to identify a show that is doing well locally in a market, and the operator of the station believes in the show so much they self-syndicate. Connoisseur Media saw the success of *Anna & Raven* on Star 99 in Connecticut, then-self syndicated the show to WALK on Long Island. That forces a show to think beyond their market. It's like a test pilot for the possibility of national syndication.

When we saw that *Anna & Raven* could be a top-rated station in Connecticut

and Long Island, we could tell, from a content-selection standpoint, they could go national.

We think the world of Connoisseur Media. That's an operator other stations will look to and say, "OK, if they believe in the show, then we will consider it in our markets."

We launched it in January; it's already up to 25 markets. In addition to the personalities, the delivery is in what we call pieces and parts. It gives a radio affiliate options to run their own local playlist. A show like that can do well on multiple formats, primarily female-leaning.

Radio Ink: What does Compass do to make the shows more successful?

Kosann: It's a sobering process. Kevin Hart says everyone wants the riches, but no one wants to do the work. Everyone wants to be syndicated, but not everyone wants to jump through all the hoops necessary to get there.

It starts with a vision of the opportunity, the steps we have to take to seize the opportunity. It starts with a vision of the content, a positioning of the asset, talking points to the marketplace, predictable benchmarks in the show that are promotable. A promotional calendar that affiliates, advertisers, and the audience

"Peter Kosann was the best thing that ever happened to the old Westwood One, and I was proud to work for him there for years. When they showed him the door, it sealed their fate and set in motion the launch of Compass Media. I was even prouder to be asked by Peter to join his new team, which has grown to hundreds of the best talk, sports, and music formats in radio, period. He runs a tight ship and minds the details so you never have to worry: will it work? If PK takes it on, it's a winner, and if others fail to see the value in something valuable (ask my friend Gordon Deal), Peter can make it work."

**Lars Larson
Syndicated Host**



L-r: Adam Wilbur, Compass VP of Affiliate Sales; Doug Ingold, Sr. Dir./Affiliate Sales, Dede McGuire, host of *DeDe in the Morning*, and Paul Gregory, President of Advertising Sales

understand. A rollout and support plan. There's a lot of groundwork that goes into it to be successful.

In some situations we're incubating programming ourselves. In some situations we're partnering with others or buying assets and improving them. With *The Wall Street Journal* a few years ago, we were their distribution and ad sales partner. Ultimately Dow Jones decided to exit the terrestrial audio business and Compass Media wound up taking over the assets. Since that time *America's First News with Gordon Deal* is now in over 325 markets. That's a morning drive show where we have seven people – journalists, reporters, and hosts – to create that show. We own that outright, along with hourly business updates called “Your

Money Now.” Every asset, we add different value to.

Radio Ink: Explain about incubating a show.

Kosann: We have developed plenty of content from scratch, and we have 100 content partnerships. On average, Compass Media has brought into syndication five to 10 new opportunities every year. In some situations there are established shows that come to us, like a John Tesh, and in that case we are only handling ad sales. In some situations we are developing content from scratch, like *Anna & Raven* in partnership with *Connoisseur*.

In other situations we are partnering with terrestrial broadcasters. For exam-

ple, with Townsquare, we have seven shows in partnership with them. About a year or two ago we teamed up with Alpha Media on *Markley, van Camp, and Robbins*. We saw an opportunity in middays on Talk radio to launch an entertainment-first show – still talking about political topics, but entertainment first. Alpha Media had rolled out *Markley, van Camp, and Robbins* successfully in Peoria, then were self-syndicating on KXL in Portland. The show was number one there. We launched them into national syndication about two years ago, and they are now in 130 markets. I would call that incubating essentially from inception.

Big D and Bubba was a show that launched us into the Country genre seven years ago. Now with their pro-

“Before we signed with Compass, I would say to my teammates I didn’t just want someone to handle syndication, I wanted a partner and a mentor. That’s what we got with Peter and Compass. I knew we were in good hands from the first meeting. Peter was the only person we met with that didn’t just tell us everything we did was great. We knew it wasn’t. And he did too. And tell us he did. And every day I’m thankful for that.”

**Gregg “Free Beer” Daniels
Co-Host
Free Beer & Hot Wings Show**



Peter Kosann with Dallas Cowboys SVP Eric Sudol and mascot Rowdy

duction company, Silverfish Media, we have another three shows together. We recently launched *Y’all Access Live with Kelly Sutton*, which is a countdown show. We do it every which way.

In play-by-play sports, in 2009 we saw the category as underserved. We launched the third Sunday NFL double-header package. Today it’s much more dominant. We launched an alternative college football package anchored by the Big 10 championship. We launched a college basketball package anchored by the Big 10 men’s tournament. Initially we were bringing intellectual property from Learfield Sports and all their 80 teams, which was unique to the marketplace.

Today we have 7,500 affiliates, roughly 100 content offerings, virtually all genres other than Spanish.

We’re in services. We bought YamanAir Creative, which is the dominant creator of spec spots to the radio industry. Once upon a time radio stations had robust production departments, and sadly, those have either been shrunk or eliminated. Radio operators for local direct business need the ability for account executives to play a spec spot. Through YamanAir Creative, affiliates can get a spec spot customized within three hours of their call.

When you look at our platform, our cup runneth over with great content and solutions. From our perspective, the

“Peter knows this business better than anyone. His decisions are always data-driven and his management acumen continues to amplify our business. Plus, he’s compassionate and often hilarious!”

**~John Tesh &
Connie Sellecca**

“This sounds clichéd, but Peter Kosann truly is a once-in-a-lifetime business partner. Peter recognizes good ideas quickly and is not hampered by paralysis by analysis. Incredible business acumen, street smart, forward-thinking, calculated, yet not risk-averse.”

**Sean “Bubba” Powell
Big D & Bubba Show**



Free Beer & Hot Wings at flagship Townsquare’s WGRD-FM/ Grand Rapids, Michigan. Pictured (in front): Gregg “Free Beer” Daniels and Chris “Hot Wings” Michels. In back: Peter Kosann, Joe Gassmann, Kelly Cheese, and Producer Steve

industry is in dire need of exclusive, unique content from a syndication company whose only focus is on servicing the affiliates, making our partners successful.

Radio Ink: When two of radio’s biggest companies also have networks, does that make your job easier, or harder to get your content into the marketplace?

Kosann: We sincerely respect everyone in the industry. We’re here to support the industry. The enemy is not within, it is outside. We wake up every day wishing everyone well. If the bigger players are successful, they raise the bar for competition in the industry.

The industry appears to be consolidated only from the standpoint of history. We used to be an industry where one operator could only own six AM and six FM stations. Today there are 12,500 stations in America, and 10% of them are owned by the big players. It’s still a small-business industry where most of the operators need solutions. We look at it as a world of opportunity, with plenty of operators who might be fully scaled

in their market as a cluster, but on a national or regional basis are subscale. They need more than ever more affordable programming that moves the needle for them.

Radio Ink: Anything else you want the readers to know about the company?

Kosann: We’ve been blessed with literally no attrition all these years. We have relationships with our content providers that over time have become very personal. We’ve become wedded in their lives. There’s virtually nothing we wouldn’t do for our friends and partners. It becomes a very symbiotic relationship.

Lars Larson has been a friend and partner for 25 years. Greg Daniels from *Free Beer & Hot Wings* has been the same for 13 years. *Big D and Bubba* are like my brothers from another mother. These are deep and personal relationships. It starts because we perform in a very thoughtful way for our partners. We think of ourselves as in the same boat with them, rowing very hard to achieve their goals.