Billboard

AN IDEA WITH WHEELS

January 27, 2007

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A new radio service targeting school bus listeners is not without detractors Public service announcements are plentiful on Bus Radio, a network that began broadcasting entertainment programs to school buses this year.

Needham, Mass.-based Bus Radio, which currently reaches 100,000 students, expects to reach 1 million kids in 11 states by the end of the 2006-2007 school year. With the push of a button, bus drivers can air separate broadcasts for elementary, middle and high school students at no cost to the districts.

Each hourlong block, taped separately for the morning and afternoon commutes, contains 44 minutes of music, talk and interviews. The remainder is divided between national advertisers and messages about bus safety, healthy eating and other issues.

Bus Radio pays school districts according to how much they use the broadcasts and how many students ride the buses. The company won't name its advertisers or the labels whose content it has licensed. A demonstration broadcast featured songs by acts including Christina Aguilera and Gnarls Barkley. A promo by Avril Lavigne advised students to "stay in your seats, stay in school and stay tuned to Bus Radio." Lavigne's manager, Terry McBride, arranged for the promo because "any chance to be anywhere our audience hangs out is where we should be." PD Ed Moloney has also sought out unsigned acts and "artists that labels are having a tough time getting to FM radio." What Moloney is not looking for is risqu? content. "If there is a parental advisory sticker [on the CD], that's a red flag for us," says Moloney, who prints out lyrics and screens songs for cursing and innuendo…

…Holly Janvrin, a bus driver and PTA president at Salisbury Elementary in Salisbury, Mass., calls Bus Radio a "long overdue" alternative to crude shock-jock content and alcohol ads. "I find my bus singing a lot," Janvrin says, citing "Hannah Montana" as a particular favorite. "And I find they are staying in their seats more."