

All Access: 10 Questions with ... Chad Benson



CHAD BENSON

Talk Show Host

Network: Radio America

Market: National

Company: Radio America/Univocity Media, Inc.

Born: Long Beach, CA Dec. 20, 1970



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BRIEF CAREER SYNOPSIS:

Out of high school, played professional soccer in the UK for the Bristol Rovers, Falkirk, Scotland and Portsmouth Football Club. After blowing out my knee, early gigs in radio with KZLA and KEZY in Los Angeles, later going to Talk Radio UK. Then, back in LA at K-Earth, produced Robert W. Morgan. Production Director and Air Talent at Entercom, CBS and Clear Channel in Sacramento 2003-2008. In 2009-10, Production Director and Talk Host at KTSA/San Antonio. In late 2012, joined Morris in Palm Springs as a morning host on their Hot AC and Classic Hits stations before moving to their KNWZ AM & FM news/talk station until the show went national on Radio America in March 2015. Co-owner of Univocity Media, Inc., which produces and licenses the show to Radio America.

1. Okay, you had a pretty unusual route into radio. How did you first get into radio, and what led you, after doing voiceover and imaging for years, into talk radio?

After my brief stint as a professional soccer player on the other side of the Atlantic, I knew that I wanted to use my other God-given talent to entertain. I had done voices since I was a kid and had dreamed of one day voicing cartoons - - I wanted to be Mel Blanc or Charles "Daws" Butler. But, I also wanted to have fun on the radio like Rick Dees. I've never shied away from chasing my dreams and so I jumped into radio with both feet. After coming back to the States and cutting my teeth as a production jockey and air talent, the opportunity presented itself for me to head back to London and be part of Talk Radio UK. I loved that experience, and my passion for conversing with people about what is going on in the world around us, and debating issues, really flourished.

2. What makes your show different from other radio talk shows?

Simple. While I am conservative, I am also a very independent thinker. Today, it seems like most of what we hear on talk radio is 'this sides bad' and 'the president is evil,' blah blah blah. We're not non-stop political talking points. I focus first on being entertaining, and then informative. I don't take myself too seriously. Plus, my show is about 3 things: the first is life, not just politics. We discuss real life, from parenting to healthcare. Yeah, I don't shy away from tackling race and terrorism and the big current events issues. But, it's not all about that.

Next, I want to talk about solutions to the issues we face. I don't have an appetite to just bitch and moan about what we don't like. Let's collectively put our minds together and find the path out of a predicament. Too many programs want to just shout bumper-sticker slogans day after day without working towards solutions.

Finally, there has got to be humor. We do a lot of parody and give people the gift of laughter, because that is what life is about. Real people are not consumed solely with politics 24/7. An example of a recent week's topics included: Super Bowl, Beyoncé, Parenting, Drugs, Suicides and Concussion Link, and Alligator and Shark attacks. When Cecil the Lion was killed by an American dentist, we hooked up on the show with the lion's brother via Skype and had a discussion about how sport hunting there has paid for conservation efforts, too. We even feature free commercials for P.C.U. - - that's Politically Correct University - - in case you want to send your Millennial child someplace where they will never have to get their feelings hurt. It's a style and approach that Radio America has been extremely supportive of and it's great to be part of their line-up.

3. Perhaps in the same vein as the last question, how, if anything, did your European travels and work inform how you do radio now? How different was doing radio in the U.K. from working in radio in the States?

Radio in the UK and Europe is as much product and on-air talent as it is sales. Here it seems it is all business. Too often, in the U.S., the product suffers because talent has been marginalized. Could you imagine how the NFL or NBA or MLB would look if they stopped caring about the on-field product and decided to just focus on ticket sales? There are so many very talented players out there and the farm system has really vanished. Sure, there are podcasters, but where's the investment in a coaching staff to bring up a new generation of superstars? I'm fortunate that I get to work with some people who have that vision and who have helped me to grow as a performer. I hope that there will be more of that in our industry here in the U.S. going forward.

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4. In an election year, how do you find the right balance between talking about the election and talking about other things? Do you set limits on categories of topics or do you just go with the moment?

In my show, we will hit it all. Of course, we will focus on the election. But, that is not the be-all, end-all. Some days, we hit 10 subjects; others, it will be 15. And, understanding how the audience is transitory, like any good station, we revisit the "hits." Our goal is to make sure that every listening occasion holds that person as long as possible, and every time they come back to us, they feel engaged and entertained. I don't want to do a single topic or even two for an hour, and give the audience any reason to tune out. By no means is the political content not important to our program. There is no syndicated program that I'm aware of that goes the extra mile for these important matters like our show. Every single debate that has taken place on a weekday; as well as some political forums, caucuses and primary nights, the Chad Benson Show is there for our affiliates with bonus coverage. We do live analysis, commentary and conversation for an additional two to three hours for our affiliates. The same goes for a breaking news situation. It's part of my commitment to our audience and our stations. I never "clock out," and it's been something that many of our stations have said they really appreciate about the show, including WIBC in Indianapolis, WDBO in Orlando, KXNT in Las Vegas, and KTSA in San Antonio.

5. What's your prep process? What sources do you use to get your show ready?

My show is on at 3 pm Pacific, and I start prepping about 4 or 5 am. I'm an information junkie, and peruse everything from Drudge to the Hill, as well as Huffington Post, Salon, Breitbart, and numerous European publications. I get to my office at about 8 am, and start going over show with my staff. We have all been 'watching the world' and start tossing around a powerful mix of topics. That's when I make, barring any breaking story, what I want done for the day.

I am blessed to have an incredible crew, including my business partner and executive producer John "the Czar" McMullen, the enormously talented and hilarious "Producer Phil" McGeehan, who rocks it from the Radio America master control studio in Arlington, Virginia, and our local audio production ace Scott "Johnny Toot" Isabell. In every sense, this program is a product of extraordinary team work done by a group that really knows how to think beyond the borders about all the elements that will make a listener satisfied and tell their friends and family about the show. We're not just reading what's going on in the world, we're producing parody, writing lyrics and performing songs that tell our stories each day, getting out on the streets and talking to people. And, as part of my 24/7 show prep, there's also a huge amount of social media interaction that is part of that process. I'm talking with the audience around the clock if I'm awake.

6. With all the talk about podcasts, streaming, and on-demand, what do you anticipate talk radio will look (sound!) like in, say, ten years? Do you expect live talk radio, on AM or FM, to still be around, will podcasts or some other form be predominant, will it be some combination thereof, or is it all going to end up as something on Facebook (assuming that even Facebook is still around)?

Talk Radio will be around on both AM and FM, but there will be other Podcast and similar services that will play a significant role in the world of spoken-word entertainment, I believe. I'm not of the mind that something that has always been free to consumers (broadcast radio) is going to fade off the dashboard of anyone's car. Yeah, we have to compete in an increasingly digital world with digital options from satellite radio to mobile-accessible podcasts. But I think that this is what compels us all to be mindful of how to utilize these new technologies and ways that people can listen.

With my program, we're jumping beyond just the podcasts and online listening capability and going to be building fresh content with characters who appear as part of the show into their own digital content offerings to further reinforce listener/brand allegiance. In fact, at the production company I'm a partner in, we're working on a project right now that will ultimately be available as an animated online original video series with promotional ties back to the radio show, as well as launching our own video game applications for listeners. We want to do things that keep the show's brand top of mind.

7. Of what are you most proud?

Being a dad to Jack Thomas Benson, my son!

8. Who are your influences, mentors, and/or inspirations, in business and in life?

My dad and mom. My dad showed me how not to live life. While he loved me, he had demons that he warned me of. And, my Mom showed me what hard work and showing up in life can get you, my son he inspires me everyday to be a better man. I'm also grateful for the mentoring of a great programmer and strategist, David G. Hall, and my business partner and chief cheerleader, John McMullen.

9. Fill in the blank: I can't make it through the day without _____.

...lemonade and my Smart Phone....

10. What's the most valuable lesson you've learned in your radio career?

That it's a business, and to surround yourself with people that are going in the right direction. I've learned how important it is to empower them to do their job and you stay in your lane and focus on what you do.