

# Syndication Special

How Khool Aid and E-Dub's passion for Latin hip-hop helped build a mini syndie empire

## Life Partners Become Syndication Partners

By Darnella Dunham

Typically, when an ambitious on-air personality makes the bold move toward syndicating his or her show, an aircheck or demo is submitted to a syndicator in hopes of earning a slot on the company's roster. ■ But Khool Aid, former midday personality for Emmis' rhythmic KPWR (Power 106)/Los Angeles, actually created a syndication company with her partner E-Dub. ■ It all started modestly with "Pocos Pero Locos," a two-hour Latin hip-hop show that launched on Power 106 in August 1999. Khool Aid, the self-described "Jewish girl from the Valley," felt that such a show would appeal to her audience.

### Reaching Out

Approaching well-respected programmers was a little daunting at first for E-Dub, but he managed to get past the anxiety of picking up the phone and making his pitch.

"The only way I can explain it is that back then, we were just kids with a dream, and I just knew that I had to sell it to them somehow," he says. "It was a bit intimidating for me, because I wasn't as experienced as I am now."

A key affiliate for "Pocos Pero Locos" was Rose City Radio's rhythmic KXJM (Jammin 95.5)/Portland, Ore., since it wasn't perceived as a market with a demand for Latin hip-hop. E-Dub confides, "My parents came from Mexico illegally, and I know that you might have multiple families living in one household. But when the cen-

sus comes, it might not be filled out by those families because they fear that they might be tracked down by immigration.

"The way I sold it to [PD] Mark Adams is that 5% is what's being accounted for. But you have to think of all the recent immigrants that are not counted. I told him by playing our show once a week, he'd build a solid following and foundation of these listeners for generations, because ultimately, it's a loyal fan base, so it totally made sense. He thought I made a good point. I told him they won't fill out the census, but they'll fill out the ratings diary."

Adams picked up the show and has become one of its biggest supporters, Khool Aid says. "It's done great for him for five or six years now. After it did

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"I was always told to target the Latinos, and I truly felt they had no voice in the molding of radio," she says. "I just didn't think it was fair—and it became my passion and goal with E-Dub to give a voice to the young Latino community."

With listeners reacting favorably, "Pocos Pero Locos" blossomed into a three-hour block. And then a simple introduction led to the launch of Radio Syndicate. "When [Upstairs Records co-CEO] Jo Lopez saw the passion we had for the show, she set us up with J.D. Gonzalez in San Antonio," Khool Aid says of Univision Radio's VP of programming. At the time, he was PD of Univision's rhythmic KBBT (98.5 the Beat)/San Antonio.

Gonzalez believed "Pocos Pero Locos" would work for KBBT and asked when it might be ready to air on his station. After the unexpected request, Khool Aid and E-Dub adjusted the imaging, started Radio Syndicate and then aggressively went after more affiliates.

"Jo would make us go to R&R and other conferences," Khool Aid says. "She had a lot to do with initially introducing us to a lot of programmers." Along with that, she and E-Dub pounded the phones, cold calling potential affiliates and building relationships.

Today, Radio Syndicate boasts three programs: "Pocos Pero Locos"; the reggaetón-focused "Subelo!," and "The Top 10 Celebrity Countdown," (see story, page 45). A fourth, "The Life & Rhymes of Tupac Shakur," will bow later this year.



Khool Aid, left, and E-Dub

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so well in Portland, we realized that this is not just a Latin hip-hop show anymore; this is good hip-hop music that unfortunately had only the one outlet in the 'Pocos Pero Locos.' JD Gonzalez would always say when it comes down to the numbers we weren't alienating any audience. Every demographic was either staying or increasing."

The only major change made after "Pocos Pero Locos" expanded outside of Los Angeles was in imaging and incorporating callers from other markets.

"At first a lot of programmers said that they wanted it to sound local," Khool Aid says. "But we realized that part of the success of our syndicated radio shows is that the kid in L.A. loves to hear the kid in Houston or the Bronx [N.Y.] shouting out to his homies. They like to hear the difference in culture."

E-Dub adds, "We've got to also think outside of the box when it comes to radio, because if you look at the way television is broadcast, kids tune into MTV and BET and understand that it's national. I think that's what they started understanding with 'Pocos Pero Locos' and 'Subelo!' and 'Top 10 Celebrity Countdown'; they are national shows and bigger than a just a local program."

## Working It . . . Together

In addition to being business partners, Khool Aid and E-Dub are husband and wife who complement each other well professionally. If Khool Aid is the face and voice of "Pocos Pero Locos," E-Dub is the hands. Khool Aid is the energetic, effervescent host, while the more subdued E-Dub is the DJ/producer who seems comfortable playing in the background. It's fair to say that both partners act equally as the heart and brains of the operation. Further, the arrangement works well and comes naturally to the couple because "this is what we met doing," Khool Aid says.

E-Dub says, "We were teenagers when we met up. I was doing music production, Khool Aid was already doing radio and she put me on to the radio production, which I had never touched in my life."

He may not have had experience as a radio producer, but E-Dub was certified as an audio engineer/producer. His talent in production was one of the characteristics that attracted Khool Aid to him.

"He made a badder radio drop than anybody in radio I had ever heard because of his production skills," Khool Aid says, joking. "I figured I would trade services for services, so that's how the whole marriage thing came about—because I didn't want to pay for studio time."

The only setback of working and living together, they agree, is that the shop never really closes. "When we roll over at night, I'm asking if he's called this person or that person," Khool Aid says.

## Leaving The 9 To 5

Radio Syndicate's rapid growth hasn't come without sacrifice for Khool Aid. Its success showed the partners that their instincts about the demand for their programming was dead-on. However, it



## Radio Syndicate's Programs

### "Pocos Pero Locos"

**Launch date:**

August 1999

**Description:** Latin hip-hop

**Length:** Three hours

**Affiliates:** 38

### "Subelo!"

**Launch date:**

April 2005

**Description:** Reggaeton

**Length:** Two hours

**Affiliates:** 20

### "The Top 10 Celebrity Countdown"

**Launch date:**

July 2006

**Description:** Hip-hop's 10 biggest songs of the week

**Length:** One hour

**Affiliates:** 11

### "The Life & Rhymes of Tupac Shakur"

**Launch date:** This year

**Description:** Music from rapper Tupac Shakur

**Length:** One hour

**Affiliates:** N/A



became almost impossible for Khool Aid to handle her midday shift at Power 106. Meeting current and potential affiliates in addition to promoting "Pocos Pero Locos" was a tall order, so she eventually parted ways with the station, which has a history of very little turnover—a move that proved extremely difficult.

"That was my dream as a kid," Khool Aid says. "I miss the people and just the connection I had with my listeners on a daily basis, but I knew that I had a mission statement that was so much bigger—something that God sent me here for: to reinvent radio and give people the something that they really want, to make radio move and shake again. In a time of iPods and downloads and so many forms of entertainment, I felt like radio had lost its edge and it was our job to bring back what people really want to move and shake that meter."

## Entering A New Arena

Aside from their trio of syndicated programs, Khool Aid and E-Dub have made a successful move into the record side of the industry with their label Silent Giant, whose signing Down aka Kilo is currently top 15 on the R&R Rhythmic

chart with single "Lean Like a Cholo."

Just as with "Pocos Pero Locos," the couple's music biz venture was created by their passion for bringing a specific brand of music to listeners who weren't finding it.

Khool Aid and E-Dub recently returned to Power 106—the first station to air one of their programs. They weren't there to promote one of their shows, but to bring Down aka Kilo in for an interview. "Cholo" is currently one of the station's top 15 most-played songs.

"I'm really excited about 'Lean Like a Cholo' because it proves that it's not just Latin hip-hop," Khool Aid says. "This is a hip-hop hit record that has crossed over to blacks and whites and Asians. Not only is it a rhythmic hit, it's just an overall hit record and that's what our shows are made of."

"When people have such passion for what they do, they want it to be the right thing," Khool Aid explains. "Dub and me have built everything for the people and the audience. When we started the company, we were more worried about our credibility. We weren't starting it to build a syndication company with multiple radio shows. We started it for a voice for the people, and we wanted that voice to be untainted." **R&R**

## Expanding The Empire

Khool Aid and E-Dub are far from complacent. While their current roster of shows continues to pick up affiliates and listeners, Radio Syndicate has other shows in development. However, they remain mindful about not growing too big too quickly.

"We make sure that we do it in a calculated manner,

since we are a boutique syndication company. We have to make sure that we don't spread ourselves too thin," E-Dub says. "The goal is to expand 'Celebrity Countdown' to at least 30 markets in the next six months. As we expand the shows to more markets, we'll develop more shows and of course have to

bring on more people to help us out with this workload."

The next Radio Syndicate show, "The Life & Rhymes of Tupac Shakur," is slated to debut later this year. E-Dub says, "We got the rights from the 2Pac estate to do a one-hour specialty show based on 2Pac."

2Pac died more than 10

years ago, but his music still lives on most rhythmic and urban stations nationwide, and he continues to test well. "It's almost like a 'Breakfast With the Beatles' type of thing," Khool Aid says. "But it's our Beatles; our 2Pac. We have his mom's blessing, and we're very excited about it." **—DD**