



Arbitron/Joint Communications

# What Women Want: From AC Radio

A Format-Specific Summary Taken from  
*What Women Want: Five Secrets to Better  
Ratings*

For the full study, *What Women Want: Five  
Secrets to Better Ratings*, go to:

[http://www.arbitron.com/radio\\_stations/studies1.htm](http://www.arbitron.com/radio_stations/studies1.htm)

Welcome to the Arbitron/Joint Communications summary of American women AC radio listeners. This format-specific summary is taken from a groundbreaking study based on interviews with Arbitron diarykeepers that asked the timeless question “What do women want?”

This report focuses specifically on 18- to 54-year-old female diarykeepers who listen to AC radio.

Three formats were identified as “subsets” of AC. They are Modern AC (represented by artists like U2, Alanis Morissette, Dave Matthews Band and Creed), Hot Adult Contemporary (represented by artists like Sugar Ray, Lenny Kravitz, Matchbox 20 and Santana) and Mainstream Adult Contemporary (represented by artists like Faith Hill, Celine Dion, Elton John and Phil Collins).

In most cases, women who listen to any of the three versions of AC share similar tastes and expectations. However, there are some significant exceptions.

This report focuses on items that women agree on as well as the significant exceptions.

## **The Study**

In July 2001, Joint Communications conducted telephone interviews with 1,060 female Arbitron diarykeepers aged 18-54 to find out what they want from radio. Diarykeepers of all Arbitron-identified formats were included. These women were asked questions about lifestyle, loves/hates about radio, reasons for tuning in or out, and specific radio behaviors and needs. This special report focuses on AC listeners only.

## Top 10 Things to Know About Female AC Radio Listeners

- 1. Overwhelmed by Commercials.** Like other formats, over 75% of female AC listeners say their number one reason for tuning out of radio is “too many commercials.” The number was especially high among Modern AC listeners; 89% said that they tuned out of radio because of “too many commercials.” When asked what they “hate” most about radio, 37% of AC women said, “too many ads.”
- 2. Music Drives the Format.** AC has got to be music intensive to be successful with female diarykeepers. Ninety percent “strongly agree” that they listen for “music I like” and 79% said “lots of music” is very important. Among Modern AC listeners, music is incredibly important. All of them (100%) say they tune in to radio for “music I like,” and 89% say “lots of music” is a very important reason for listening to the radio.
- 3. Older Songs’ “Importance” Varies by Type of AC Format.** Among Mainstream AC listeners, older music is very important, with 66% strongly agreeing that they listen to the radio for it. However, among Hot AC and Modern AC listeners, the numbers are lower. Among Hot AC listeners, only 38% strongly agree that they listen to the radio so they can hear their favorite older songs; among Modern AC listeners, it’s only 44%.
- 4. ID Songs for Hot AC.** Almost half of all AC listeners “strongly agree” that “radio should identify songs and artists more often than they do now.” The number is particularly high among Hot AC listeners (64%)—the highest number for any format other than Urban.
- 5. Internet Use Varies a Lot by the Type of AC.** Most AC listeners have logged on to the Internet during the past seven days. The lowest percent of “log-ons” is among Mainstream AC radio, where 36% have not logged on and 64% have. Internet usage is much higher with Hot AC (75%) and Modern AC (89%). This suggests that the Internet can be a valuable tool for Hot AC and Modern AC programmers to reach their listeners.  
  
However, a word of caution: There is far more logging on at home than at work. Only 14% of Mainstream AC listeners, 8% of Hot AC listeners and 11% of Modern AC listeners log on at *work only*. To put this in perspective, 31% of Mainstream AC, 44% of Hot AC and 52% of Modern AC listeners log on at *home only*. The remainder log on *both* at work and at home.
- 6. Funny DJs Work Best with Modern AC.** Among all women who listen to the radio, 37% “strongly agree” that “DJs should make me laugh.” These numbers are consistent with Mainstream AC (36%) and Hot AC (39%). However, among Modern AC listeners, 48% “strongly agree” with the statement, tying with female Country listeners for the highest demand for DJs who make them laugh.
- 7. Some AC Listeners Take Better Care of Themselves Than Others.** In general, AC listeners are slightly less likely to worry than listeners to other formats and more likely to take care of themselves. Almost one-third (32%) of Mainstream AC listeners “exercise a lot” compared to 23% of all women who listen to radio. Among Hot AC listeners, 28% exercise a lot. However, among Modern AC listeners, the number is much lower (11%).

- 8. Kid Sensitive.** AC radio women are like other radio women. They don't want radio that is inappropriate for kids. Over 66% "strongly agree" they'll tune out if the kids can't (or shouldn't) listen.
- 9. Sensitize DJs.** AC women are more likely than most listeners to tune out radio if it has an "antiwoman" attitude. Sixty-one percent "strongly agree" that it's a major reason for turning off the radio. And when it comes to "cheesy" or "phony" announcers, Modern AC listeners rate it as a major reason for tuning out (74%).
- 10. Contests Are Polarizing.** On the whole, female AC diarykeepers are even less likely than the average diarykeeper to agree with the statement "I like to listen to contests with a chance to win prizes." Only 18% of Mainstream AC and Hot AC listeners strongly agreed with that statement and 27% strongly disagreed. Modern AC listeners are even more turned off by contests: Only 11% strongly agreed that they listen to contests with a chance to win prizes and 41% "strongly" disagreed.

When asked whether "radio contests are fun to listen to even if I don't play them," there was a very slight positive bias. Among Mainstream Adult Contemporary listeners, 25% strongly agreed with the statement and 17% strongly disagreed. Among Hot AC listeners there was almost equal polarization, with 15% strongly agreeing and 16% strongly disagreeing. The same type of polarization continued for Modern AC, where 22% strongly agreed and 19% strongly disagreed.

## Key Findings

1. **Like listeners to other formats, AC radio women say that “favorite music” is their biggest reason for tuning in. Their desire for “lots of music” is strongly associated with “little talk.”** Music is especially important among Modern AC listeners. Over 87% want “music I like” and over 77% want “lots of music” (with Modern AC leading at 89%). They also want mostly music with very little talk. Over two-thirds consider it “very important.”

For women in general, the demand for “music I like” does not change with age, but the demand for “lots of music” declines. This emphasizes that picking the correct songs is key in keeping women tuned in. Just over half of Mainstream AC (53%) and Hot AC (57%) listeners “strongly agree” they would tune out if they hear a song they don’t like. Among Modern AC listeners, this number jumps to 78%.

2. **Top songs are an important part of the music mix.** Almost half of all Adult Contemporary listeners “strongly agree” that they want to hear new, up-to-date songs. Among the different formats, 44% of Mainstream AC, 51% of Hot AC and 52% of Modern AC listeners strongly agreed.

In addition, “the top songs,” such as the Top 10 or Top 20, are also important, especially to Mainstream AC and Hot AC listeners. For both those formats, 45% “strongly agree” they want to hear them. Interestingly, only one-third of Modern AC listeners strongly agreed, suggesting that they are looking for “new” music that isn’t the Mainstream Top 10 or Top 20 that they associate with CHR.

3. **Too many commercials is the number one tune-out.** Women had no problem telling us what they do not want, and most are saying it loud and clear. “Too many commercials” is the reason they turn the dial. While programmers and managers argue about spot loads, women are busy tuning out the station.

Over 75% of AC radio women said that “Too many commercials” cause them to tune out. The number was particularly high among Modern AC listeners, where 89% strongly agreed that it was the number one reason for tuning out from radio. When asked what they “hate,” about radio, all AC women volunteered “too many ads” as the number one reason.

Interestingly, the number two reason among Modern AC listeners was “specific commercials that irritate me” (81%). This suggests that if you are programming a Modern AC format, the way you treat commercials could be as important as the music you play.

4. **“Mood” needs vary among different types of AC listeners.** Mainstream Adult Contemporary radio has been perceived as a “mood” service that keeps people company. Among women who listen to AC radio, this study unearthed some surprises.

Mainstream AC is still driven by a need to relax (72% strongly agree) and to keep them company (55% strongly agree). Interestingly, only 45% of Mainstream AC listeners “strongly agree” that “radio helps reduce my stress” and only 35% said they use radio to change their mood.

This is in sharp contrast to Modern AC listeners. Modern AC listeners use the radio to get them into the mood they want—which is usually a relaxed one.

They are more likely than any other format listener to strongly agree with the statement “radio helps reduce stress” (56%). And the same number (56%) strongly agreed that they listen to the radio to relax. They are much less likely than any other format listener to say they listened to radio to keep them company (only 37% strongly agree), but they are much more likely than any other format to strongly agree that they use radio to change their mood (52%).

Hot AC listeners don’t use the radio as much of a mood service. Overall, they have the lowest number of listeners who “strongly agree” about the use of radio as a mood service among any format. Only 49% strongly agree that “radio should make me feel good,” compared to 65% of all women. Only 28% strongly agree that they use radio to change their mood, compared to 35% of all women; and only 31% strongly agree that they listen to radio to help reduce their stress (the lowest of any format).

- 5. Only half of all Adult Contemporary listeners tune in to radio at work.** Only 49% of all AC listeners listen to the radio at work. This suggests that the “at-work” focus of many Adult Contemporary stations is a two-edged sword. On one hand, it allows them to generate good average quarter-hour share because at-work listeners spend over five hours a day listening to the radio. On the other hand, it has the potential to disenfranchise the other 50% who don’t listen at work and might feel left out.

On the whole, most AC listeners are fairly happy at their jobs, with over 60% strongly agreeing that “my job gives me great satisfaction.” They are very happy with their coworkers, and over 60% use radio at work mostly as background music.

Although many radio stations have strong “at-work” networks or frequent-listener clubs, only 4% of AC listeners belong to these clubs. Frequent-listener clubs do generate disproportionate loyalty and passion from listeners.

However, there are just as many at-work frequent-listener club members among all women 18-54 who work as there are among AC listeners.

This suggests that one of AC’s main methods of generating average quarter-hour share is being copied and well utilized by competition in other formats.

- 6. AC listeners are time-pressured and worried about their children.** Over half of all AC listeners strongly agree, “I never have enough time to get everything done.” This concern is particularly strong among Mainstream AC listeners, where 62% strongly agreed.

Like most other women, AC listeners are very likely to worry about their children’s safety. Over 60% of all AC listeners strongly agreed that they worry about their children’s safety. Among Mainstream AC listeners, the number who worry increases to 71%.

- 7. Women continue to be optimists and American Dreamers.** Even though women are heavily pressured for time and worry a lot, they remain optimists. So, don’t play to the negatives.

Over 80% of AC radio Arbitron diarykeepers “strongly agree” that hard work brings success, and 70% believe they can be whatever they choose to be—statistics that are uniquely American, reflecting a free and upwardly mobile society. Sixty-four percent of these women also said that they feel happy and content most of the time.

So, make sure that you help them feel good without pandering to them. Don't talk *at* them. Don't talk too much at all. And don't tell them that you are helping them relax.

Instead, provide an environment where they feel comfortable, where they can wind down, and where they hear songs they love, few commercials and not a lot of talk.

- 8. AC listeners watch less TV than other women.** Perhaps because they're so pressured for time, AC listeners watch TV about 20 minutes a day less than other women who fill in Arbitron diaries. When they do watch, their favorite shows are comedies, with "Friends" being the top choice. "Friends" is extraordinarily popular among Modern AC listeners: 28% call it one of their top two favorite shows (compared to 11% of all listeners). Close behind comedies come dramas, such as "ER" and "The West Wing." Dramas are especially popular among Modern AC listeners.

The tables turn with legal/crime dramas, such as "Law & Order." These are twice as popular among Mainstream AC and Hot AC listeners compared to Modern AC listeners.

Additionally, a couple of interesting highlights: The game show "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire" is a favorite among 12% of all Modern AC listeners, compared to just 5% of all Arbitron women 18-54. And "Survivor" is popular with Hot AC listeners, where 7% consider it one of their top two favorites, compared to only 2% of all women 18-54 who fill in Arbitron diaries.

- 9. Most AC radio women work (74%), but only half (50%) of the workers listen to radio at work.** Although the majority works in an office, at a school/college or in healthcare, 22% of Modern AC listeners worked out of a home office. This compares to only 8% of all 18- to 54-year-old women who work out of a home office. If they listen to the radio at work, time spent listening is high—so they are important to your average quarter-hour.

At one time, AC was considered the main at-work format and spent most of its marketing energy targeting working women. Based on this study, many formats are now targeting women who listen at work. In fact, AC will even get competition from formats that target women who listen to AOR, Country and Urban in the workplace. This suggests that AC programmers, whether Mainstream, Hot or Modern, should begin to look at the next level of "at-work" innovation. Otherwise, they have the potential to lose a significant number of listeners to other formats.

- 10. The Internet is important for AC listeners, especially Modern AC.** Most AC listeners access the Internet. And AC listeners have the highest percentage that log on both at work and at home. Although only 15% of all women log on to the Internet both at home and at work, 19% of Mainstream AC, 23% of Hot AC and 26% of Modern AC log on at work and at home.

If they do access the Internet, they spend slightly less time on the Web than the average diarykeeper. High Internet usage among AC listeners suggests that there are more opportunities to build relationships with those listeners using the Internet than most other formats are able to utilize. Modern AC listeners have the highest likelihood of connecting with their favorite format through the Internet. Mainstream AC has the lowest.

- 11. AC radio women say that *the best way to find out about radio stations is hearing about them from a friend.*** Even more than television? Yes. TV and billboards are a close number two. You're more likely to reach Mainstream AC or Hot AC listeners via friends. Only 70% of Modern AC listeners said they'd rather hear about it from a friend compared to 78% of AC and

80% of Hot AC listeners. Women trust their friends to make recommendations. The credibility of a reference cannot be underestimated. Stations must find ways to motivate women to “tell a friend.”

Friends are very important to AC listeners. However, TV and billboards are also strong ways to reach them. TV and billboards are a close number two behind “hearing from a friend,” and AC listeners are more likely to respond to TV than the average diarykeeper. Using the mail can also be very effective. It almost ties television in importance with Mainstream AC listeners and is strong with Hot AC (54%) and Modern AC (63%) as a way of reaching listeners.

Even though AC listeners are looking for music by “scanning the dial,” it is considered the best way by only 56% of Mainstream AC, 60% of Hot AC and 63% of Modern AC listeners. In other words, a really well-programmed station that is spread by word of mouth (possibly supported by TV and/or mail) is less likely to simply become a button that listeners punch.

**12. Contests are highly polarizing.** On the whole, AC listeners are unlikely to listen to the radio for a chance to win something even if the contest is entertaining to listen to. Only 10% of AC listeners have ever listened to the radio for a chance to win something. The number is slightly higher among Modern AC listeners, where 19% have tried. In every case, among those who tried to win, most never won anything.

When asked how important “contests with a chance to win prizes” are as a reason for tuning in, most AC listeners say they are unimportant. Over 50% disagree that “contests with a chance to win prizes are important” and just over 45% agree. Only 18% of Mainstream AC, 18% of Hot AC and 11% of Modern AC listeners “agree” that contests are important, and 28% of Mainstream AC, 26% of Hot AC and 41% of Modern AC “strongly disagree” that contests are important.

Although there is a slightly more positive response to “radio contests that are fun to listen to even if I don’t play them,” only 25% of Mainstream AC, 15% of Hot AC and 22% of Modern AC listeners strongly agree. If listeners don’t strongly agree that something is important, it means at best they are lukewarm.

## Recommendations

1. **Music, music, music.** Music is the driving tune-in factor for AC women. The most important thing is “songs I like,” and when they get music, they want lots of it. Obviously, music research is crucial if you want to satisfy this music-intensive listener.

They’re tuning in for new music or the Top 10/20 songs, as well as their favorite older songs. Make sure you ID the music. Over half “strongly agree” that they want you to ID songs and audiences *more often*.

2. **Don’t take at-work listening for granted.** Among this survey of more than 1,000 diarykeepers, working women are being targeted by almost every format and since only half of them listen to the radio at work, there are a lot more formats fishing in a smaller pool.

Don’t assume that frequent-listener clubs or at-work networks will be enough. Many other formats are doing them. In some cases, they are even reaching more listeners than AC is reaching. It’s time to rethink the “at-work” position for AC formats to create real customer value. It’s time to innovate across the board.

3. **Use the Internet.** AC listeners are more likely to use the Internet at home and at work than those who listen to most other formats. It’s especially strong among Hot AC and Modern AC listeners. Use the Internet to build a relationship with them.

Be careful with Mainstream AC. Almost a third don’t use the Internet. Make sure that you offer people a chance to communicate with your radio station if they don’t have access to the Internet.

4. **Rethink spot loads.** How do you handle commercials at your station? They are an enormous tune-out factor for AC women. AC listeners were very likely to tune out because of commercials and very likely to say the thing they hated most about radio was “too many ads.” Also, over half of them said they tuned out specifically because of irritating commercials. Remember the value of good creative. And remember that low-commercial and commercial-free satellite radio is coming.

Don’t shrug off this finding. Many programmers and managers tend to fall back on an “it is what it is” abdication of responsibility to their listeners. They know they have to run commercials so they just say, “we’ll have to take what we get.”

AC radio female diarykeepers told us that you should redouble your brainstorming efforts to figure out new ways to make commercials better and reduce the number. Companies that put time, energy and effort into this area will reap big rewards.

5. **Think about how to make your station more kid friendly.** This is an important one since over 40% of AC listeners have one or two children under 12, and tend to have more teenagers than other formats.

Making the station kid-friendly is a very big deal with all three types of AC listeners, especially Mainstream AC and Hot AC. Even among the slightly younger Modern AC listeners, almost half of them strongly agree that they wanted radio that kids can listen to.

These diarykeepers might be a “canary in the coal mine”—warning radio to rethink community responsibilities.

- 6. Rethink mood.** AC listeners don’t listen just to relax, even though it’s the very important reason for tuning in. Over a third “strongly agree” that they listen to the radio to “give me more energy,” with 44% of Modern AC listeners strongly agreeing.

And mood is more than music. Half of all AC listeners strongly agree that “radio should keep me informed,” driven by Mainstream AC listeners (59%) although Modern AC (48%) and Hot AC (44%) are close behind. Play lots of the right music, keep it kid friendly and make them feel they are plugged in.

- 7. “Know” their friends.** This merits a serious brainstorm. AC diarykeepers told us that the best way to reach them was by getting a recommendation from a friend.

Years ago, many radio stations took the easy way by creating “tell a friend” contests and then the fad petered out. It’s clear that this is worth thinking about again.

However, when you try to motivate their friends, remember that they are pressured for time, have very mixed feelings about contests and like to keep things simple. Your brainstorming may even turn up a way to motivate friends without turning it into a contest.

Get to know the bonds of friendship that connect your female listeners. Keep in mind that, in this study, they told us that one of their favorite things is to shop. And their favorite TV shows are comedies and crime dramas. Study the dynamics of friendship, apply a healthy dose of creativity and turn it into stronger radio.

- 8. Don’t be negative.** AC listeners feel positive about themselves and the world even though they worry a bit about their safety. And they really worry about their kids’ safety.

Since they’re listening to radio to get away from stress, don’t add to it. Don’t scare them, don’t be rude and don’t be condescending.

AC listeners don’t want anyone to tell them how they should feel or how they should behave. Rather, they want radio that is full of great music, fewer commercials and sufficient information so that they feel like they’re plugged in.

Finally, don’t assume that all of them listen to the radio at work. There are more AC listeners who don’t listen to the radio at work than there are who do. Make sure you balance both constituencies.

## About Arbitron

Arbitron Inc. (NYSE: ARB) is an international media and marketing research firm serving radio broadcasters, cable companies, advertisers, advertising agencies and outdoor advertising companies in the United States, Mexico and Europe. Arbitron's core businesses are measuring network and local market radio audiences across the United States; surveying the retail, media and product patterns of local market consumers; and providing application software used for analyzing media audience and marketing information data. Arbitron Webcast Services measures the audiences of audio and video content on the Internet, commonly known as webcasts. The Company is developing the Portable People Meter, a new technology for radio, TV and cable ratings.

Arbitron's marketing and business units are supported by a world-renowned research and technology organization located in Columbia, Maryland. Arbitron has approximately 750 full-time employees; its executive offices are located in New York City.

Through its Scarborough Research joint venture with VNU Media Measurement & Information, Arbitron also provides media and marketing research services to the broadcast television, magazine, newspaper and online industries.

## About Joint Communications

Joint Communications Corp. is considered a global leader in media strategy, marketing and consumer trends. For 25 years, it has helped a distinguished roster of clients to achieve remarkable success. They have included VH1, *Rolling Stone* Magazine, MTV, Wendy's, S.C. Johnson, Molson, CBS, NBC, ABC, Bryan Adams, major record companies and hundreds of radio stations in the United States, Canada, Australia, Europe and South America.

Joint Communications specializes in identifying, capturing and keeping audiences. They do it through sophisticated market research, formatting, marketing and promotion.

CEO John Parikhal co-created a successful show for NBC television as well as creating national radio hits for *Rolling Stone* and NBC Radio. Most recently, he put his talents to work in helping to engineer the rebirth and extraordinary success of VH1.

Parikhal is author of *The Baby Boom: Making Sense of Our Generation at 40*, based on the most extensive study ever done of boomers as they turned 40. He earned his master's degree with media guru Marshall McLuhan and studied for a Ph.D. in language and perception.

Parikhal has been interviewed extensively on radio, television and in magazines for his opinions on what people want and why they want it. He shares his insights in his popular *Radio & Records* column, "The Competitive Edge."

Widely recognized as a futurist who helps his clients become even more successful, Parikhal says, "There is a New Entertainment Economy emerging. It's all about control, connection and convenience—a daring tug of war between consumers and creators, between the distributors and the dissatisfied."

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