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Winter 2012

Radio pro Debbie Nigro targets 40-something-plus female demo with Still a Babe concept

from Talkers.com

By Mike Kinoshian
Special Features Correspondent

Uttered with such exuberance of Eliza Doolittle (Audrey Hepburn) in the 1964 film classic "My Fair Lady," Professor Henry Higgins (Rex Harrison) twice proclaims, "By George, she's got it." Despite the absence of breaking out into a song like "The Rain in Spain Falls Mainly on the Plain," a similar "By George, she's got it" deduction surrounds what Debbie Nigro is executing with her "Still a Babe" project.

Genuinely affirming that she and her fellow baby-boomer "babes" are actually getting younger every day, Nigro greatly anticipates each forthcoming day. That refreshing upbeat attitude is what she is delivering to an extensive target audience, who are constantly seeking ways to become ageless. Mirroring the base to which she has such strong appeal, Nigro is no stranger to being knocked to the mat; however, she refuses to succumb to setbacks.

Part of the Still a Babe philosophy features Nigro cheerleading her constituents to celebrate their imperfections and deliver humor, even though some of their physical qualities are beginning to erode. Very evident is Nigro's subscription to the laughter

can be the best medicine approach and she is extremely cognizant that this segment of the population has tremendous economic clout. They trust their fellow "girlfriends" and maverick Nigro has emerged as the primo "babe."

With that backdrop, it would certainly appear that of Nigro's entire Still a Babe package, Professor Higgins would deliver a heartily enthusiastic, "By George, she's got it," nudging industry observers that what Dynamo Debbie is doing to reach female demos could be of significant attention.

Key component - "attitude"

In only their most positive contexts, at times mysteriously nebulous catchall terms "many-sided" and "versatile" are incontrovertibly applicable to Nigro, an inexhaustibly fascinating business executive; marvelous interviewer; engaging conversationalist; accomplished author; and upbeat humorist.

Even something as mundane and elementary as a job title though takes its own Nigro-inspired twist as one of the First Wives World's founding partners was its chief executive girlfriend; currently the effervescent New York native is StillaBabe.com's chief executive babe. Owing to the fact that some misinterpret



Nigro's mission, she clarifies it by stating that when spoken to a woman over 40, "Still a babe" is a phrase that evokes a smile. I am the champion of women of a certain age who believe attitude is the key to the everlasting power of their femininity."

On and off the radar at different times of Nigro's professional career, it is a "warm feeling" whenever someone finds or appreciates the numerous talents of a woman who can rightfully lay claim to having her own branded Home Shopping Network loungewear and doing a Working Mom exercise video. "I don't take it for granted," she humbly acknowledges. "There have been some very heartbreaking moments for me, which have played a very big part of every phase of where I have been. The older you get, the more real life intertwines with your business life. I am known for humor but there are times when life isn't that funny."

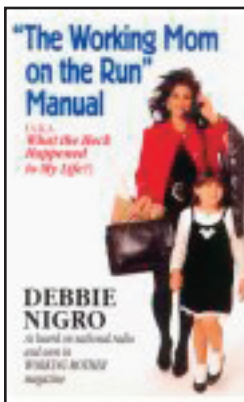
Not only is she StillaBabe's presiding babe, Nigro is also president of New Rochelle, New York-based Out of the Box Deals, a public relations/strategic alliance advisory company; what she is trying to accomplish in her latest venture is the entire collection of her experiences - good and bad. "It is about figuring out how to enjoy your life through it all and being around people who bring out the best in you," she asserts. "I have great instincts about people

and have so much information to share. My revenue will come from media, product sales, offline events and licensing. This is a collective power of the purse. Women want to play with whom they trust. I let my guard down so they know who I am."

Heavy hitter

Simultaneous with rollups and acquisitions of programs fronted by such talk radio stalwarts as Rush Limbaugh and Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Nigro "didn't know any better" and created her own radio-television syndication company, which she ran from 1993-2000. Looking to sink her teeth into something further, she strongly believed that a project geared toward working mothers would be extremely appropriate. "I didn't even know what the internet was and didn't get what it meant," Nigro concedes. "Sometimes you don't know what you have because you are so early on it, but we had one million hits the first month of Working-Mom.com."

Some 120 stations carried her three-hour live weekend "Working Mom" program, while approximately 500 affiliates aired its companion short-form features. Realizing that busy mothers do not spend much of their free time in bookstores, the unconventional-thinking Nigro conducted a 30-day tour to promote her 192-page, 1995 "Working Mom on the Run Manual" at more than two-dozen 7-Eleven stores around the country. "It was one of the most successful promotions in the history of Southland Corporation," boasts Nigro, who built her own Greenwich, Connecticut radio studio in 1998. "We got about 45 stations for the 10am-Noon show and beat the network curve, which was then about 25 new stations a year. The demographic for what I am doing is women - whether they are married, single, divorced, gay or straight. They are all connected by the common core of possessing the desire to share a sense of humor about their life stage. The largest demographic with the most disposable income is Women 40-65."



Albeit that they themselves are aging, some within that coveted target demo are in the demanding, grossly unsung role of caretakers and as Nigro comments, "They are



aware the clock is ticking on their own dreams. My joy is to instigate them to pay attention to whatever has been on their own 'bucket list.' There is no expiration date on sexy."

Created in the framework of a talk show, Nigro's website was formulated with product placement and sponsor dollars in mind. "Deep layers of content cut through the clutter and celebrate everything from imperfections to staying alive," she points out.

More than anything else Nigro is immersed in writing and assembles everything on the website. "The content has to be kept fresh, current and moving," she remarks. "It takes a lot of thinking about what is relevant and interesting. My dream is to understand the multi-platform game board better than anyone else. I'd love to do a live, video talk show that could be repurposed on radio, television, online and cell phones. I understand all the distribution platforms and the revenue potential."

Channeling a positive outlet

In stark contrast to her present day, svelte camera-friendly figure, Nigro was a self-described "chubby kid" so she felt she had to resort to some type of chicanery to be popular. "It wasn't going to be my looks - it had to be my personality," she opines. "My sense of humor had to come from that time. I put much more effort into being fun and friendly than did the skinny girls. My nature is to extend my exorbitant, positive energy and make others have a good time. Humor was always the way I'd get peoples' attention. I get a big kick out of making others smile."

Standup comedy was therefore a natural progression for Nigro who, when comparing radio personalities to comedians working in clubs, observes that if listeners hate you on radio, you don't instantly know about it. "Apparently I'm pretty damn funny because I was successful at standup. The Betty White thing may have sparked it but older, funny broads are 'in' right now -

lucky me. Howard Stern has made his living being funny to a certain demographic. I would love to have a platform where I could appeal to women by being saucy and fun, without crossing the line of good taste."

Siberian husky

A voracious reader with the uncanny knack to arrange all puzzle pieces enabling her to effectively view the big picture, Nigro was a Saturday morning news reporter at Ithaca, New York's WTKO; interned in Westchester (NY) at WVOX; and received a Bachelor of Science degree in Radio & Television from Ithaca College. "When I was at WVOX, it took me 15 hours to do a 30-second spot but I always pushed the envelope - that's what I am all about," she remarks. "I didn't go into radio because of my voice: I went into it because of the medium. I had a lot to express and to share."

Notwithstanding her complete lack of golf knowledge, Nigro eagerly consented to cover the Westchester Classic Golf Tournament when WVOX's sports reporter quit just prior to the PGA event. "I was never afraid to attempt something I hadn't done before," she declares. "In college, I was drawn to Frank Carpano [now a WJAR-TV, Providence sportscaster]. He was very entrepreneurial and we started an ad agency, Ideas of Ithaca. I had no idea what I was doing but followed along with Frank. I always had the broadcasting/business side in me. I follow trends and see things that no one else does. I've always had good instincts, as well as the ability to take the information I find interesting and package it in a way that gets attention."

While on her home turf of Westchester where virtually everyone knew her name, Nigro became the morning personality at WFAS. "That was a very big opportunity for me," she recounts. "My father was alive then and was so cute. He'd buy radios for people and tune in the station for them so they could listen."

Describing her later wakeup tenure at New York City's WPIX-FM as "a whole lot of crazy fun," the creator/host of the long-running video series "Debbie Does Divorce" notes, "It hadn't happened in quite some time that a woman was doing morning drive there. When WNBC-AM moved Howard Stern from afternoon drive to mornings, I joked that I was moved to Siberia. They didn't think a woman going

up against him was going to work. I was mad at the industry and mad at the entire choice of my life. The natural course of the business makes you reassess your desire to stay in it."

Calling on Avon

The thought of doing a talk show appealed to Nigro, although she admits even she didn't know exactly what that meant. Nevertheless, in mid-1993, she made a cold call to Avon Products. "They hadn't spent one dollar in radio in over 100 years of the company," states Nigro, a consultant to producers of "The First Wives Club Musical," scheduled to premier next year (2012). "Avon gave me \$5,000 and told me to make it a national show. The next seven or eight years were just awesome. I was the keynote speaker at Avon's conventions. The entire 'Working Mom on the Run' thing came out of my life. All of my content for the female market typically comes from something I am living and understand intimately. It cost a lot of money to do a nationally syndicated talk show. I would like to think that if I had more financially savvy partners, I would be in a much different place in my life right now - but it wasn't meant to be."

Ever resilient and always searching for the next trend, Nigro in September 2005 teamed with Lifestyle TalkRadio Networks to do a two-hour show from her house every day; her daily, 90-second "Debbie's Diary" aired

on over 300 outlets. "I made everything I was working on - like 'Still a Babe' and 'First Wives Club' - into segments," the three-time Gracie Award winner for "Best Nationally Syndicated Talk Show" explains. "I was driving peoples' web hits after they came off the air with me. Whenever you try something that hasn't been done before, you must have the confidence to believe in yourself."

Beach babe

Many people possess grandiose ideas but mistakenly allow others to squash their spirit. "I have nothing to lose and since it's never too late to begin again, I'm giving it another whirl," proclaims Nigro. "I'm doing what is in my heart. I am just wise enough and old enough to think I could pull it off."

Especially in light of such an enviable track record, there is every reason to believe the highly-driven Nigro will achieve another success story, paving the way for her next more tongue-in-cheek goal. "I want to open a tiki bar and lay on the beach the rest of my life," she jests. "I'm going to figure out how to do that."



Mike Kinoshian is special features correspondent for TALKERS magazine. He can be e-mailed at mike.kinoshian@gmail.com.