

Local Web radio site WOXY.com goes off air

Last-minute deal to save Austin station fell through, owner says

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Online radio station WOXY.com stopped broadcasting Tuesday morning after owner Future Sounds Inc. was unable to secure funding for operating expenses. The station, which dubbed itself "the future of rock and roll," relocated to Austin from Cincinnati last summer and shared space in the ME-TV building on South Congress Avenue.

Los Angeles-based Future Sounds, which purchased WOXY from online music service Lala.com early last year, independently financed the station as it sought outside sources of money. The company had been exploring options through last week's South by Southwest Music Conference and Festival but was unable to secure a deal that would keep the station on the air.

"We've been looking at partnerships and the possibility of a sale, and had an eleventh-hour deal that fell through on Sunday," Future Sounds partner John Mascarenhas said. "There are a lot of people fighting for a little bit of money."

The station had limited advertising but not enough to cover costs.

Mascarenhas pointed to the cost of staffing the station with disc jockeys, as opposed to the automated playlists used by other online services such as Pandora, as a major obstacle to funding. "The costs are higher, but that's why we deliver a better product," he said.

Founded in 1983 as a terrestrial station, 97X, based in Oxford, Ohio, the station began broadcasting its FM signal online in 1997. It garnered national attention for its focus on independent alternative rock. In recent years, the station has been particularly active in Austin, hosting events and taping live performances during SXSW.

Financial problems are nothing new for the station. It went off the air briefly in 2004, when Dallas-based First Broadcasting Investment Partners, which had purchased the station from its original owners, were unable to get funding. After quickly finding new investors, the station returned a few months later in an online-only format.

General manager Bryan Jay Miller said there has always been a level of uncertainty regarding the future of the station.

"It's a startup, and you kind of have to expect that, no matter what is said, that anything can happen at any point," he said.

WOXY music director Matt Shiv, who moved to Austin last year along with DJ Joe Long, program director Mike Taylor and media director Brian Niesz, expressed disappointment and thanked listeners in a note posted to Facebook on Tuesday.

"I am thrilled that I have had a part in helping to program this station since 1998 and am incredibly proud of WOXY's legacy," Shiv said.

Miller said that while he wasn't particularly optimistic that the station would get back on the air, he wasn't ruling anything out. "I don't expect anything to come along, but I wouldn't be surprised if something does," he said.

Mascarenhas said that he has received several inquiries about the station since the announcement and needs to sort through options.

"Our goal is for WOXY to remain in Austin and have it turned on, whether if that is with us as owners or selling it completely," he said.

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