



Boat cruise broadens 'Intelligence for Your Life' brand and inspires new franchise for syndicated host

## Now John Tesh Walks On Water

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**W**hen John Tesh was looking to bankroll a daily radio show four years ago based on the novel concept of motivational guidance to improve relationships, careers and health, a skeptical investor asked the entertainer how long such a concept could thrive in a media world driven by salacious celebrities and entertainment headlines focusing on anything but the positive in people. ■

"I told him, as long as people want to better themselves, as long as they are on diets, as long as anyone makes a decision to evolve—forever," Tesh says.

With an initial expenditure of \$1.5 million, TeshMedia Group managed to get off the ground with 10 affiliates—but the format was no easy sell. "I didn't take a salary for the first three-and-a-half years," he says, outlaying funds for an auspicious staff of 10 full-time researchers and affiliate maestro and executive VP of entertainment Scotty "Pitbull" Meyers, along with cutting-edge equipment that includes seven Prophet systems (in office and at home), Pro Tools HD and a satellite uplink. "If this show was owned by a larger entity, we would have never made it."

Today, "Music and Intelligence for Your Life" boasts more than 250 reported outlets across a myriad of adult-driven formats heard in every daypart by a weekly audience estimated to be in excess of 8 million listeners. The program is customized by

market. Stations can choose between a five-hour music-inclusive show or just pick up Tesh's factoids and add their own music. "It's like going to Whole Foods, where we offer the precooked ingredients, and then you make them your own," he says.

In January, Tesh emboldened his mission by floating a new concept: a seven-day boat cruise for 300 devotees, originating in Long Beach, Calif., sailing roundtrip across the Mexican Riviera. An ambitious agenda packed in all that personifies Tesh's radio show, including forums by Dan Miller, author of "48 Days to the World You Love," aimed at landing your dream job, starting a business and finding purpose in career, and Dr. Don Colbert, author of "Seven Pillars of Health," focusing on faith, nutrition and exercise. Platinum Christian/AC group MercyMe was also onboard for two shows.

### Tesh's Multimedia Travelogue

John Tesh's media career began as a news anchor at WSM-TV/Nashville in the '70s. He segued to WCBS-TV/New York, where, at 23, he was the station's youngest reporter, before being hired in 1986 to co-host "Entertainment Tonight." In 1987, eyeing a career in music, he toured as a keyboardist with his friend Gianni.

By 1996, despite a seven-figure salary, he left "ET," disillusioned by the gig's shallowness. "Reading celebrity birthdays on the air every day made me a lot of money, but it did nothing to impact people," he says.

Tesh hit pay dirt as a musician in the mid-

'90s, when he recorded a concert album and PBS special, "Live at Red Rocks." He has since appeared on 50 albums, while his career includes three gold albums and two Grammy Award nominations.

Next month, he will release an inspirational CD, "A Passionate Life," followed by a DVD that dares to strike a pose against his goody-two-shoes image: the playful "Piano Gospel Dance," meshing his music with gospel choirs and—no, really—hip-hop dance.

"I'm just a layperson," Tesh says. "My goal is to make people's lives better." —CT



John Tesh delivers the "music" segment of "Music and Intelligence for Your Life" on the first Tesh Cruise.

"[They] delivered such a strong message about living a loving life," Tesh says.

Naturally, the show's namesake also performed his well-bred brand of new age/inspirational music, both with a full band and a stripped-down "storyteller" motif.

The agenda wasn't all about intensive inspiration. In addition to daytime stops at Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlan and Cabo San Lucas on the Carnival Pride cruise line, participants had full benefits of the ship—restaurants, spa, casino, lounges, nightclubs and duty-free shopping—as well as the evening allure of "Tesh Idol," commandeered by the show's comedic Web producer Gib Gerard. The first-place winner was given the opportunity to perform onstage with Tesh's band.

So did the concept ultimately hold water? Tesh says, "The best thing is that here we are in 3,000 feet of ocean, and nobody can go anywhere. I believed we could take the concept of living a life of power, passion and purpose and make it happen live—we tried it once during a concert setting, but after five minutes, it was obvious that people started thinking of getting home to their babysitter.

"The cruise allowed us to put so much more meat into it, with the closed environment. We focused on areas where you address goals, collect information and study with informed PhDs, who are offering suggestions to move your life forward."

Among the most gratifying elements, Tesh adds, "is that you're giving a concert or attending a lecture, and then everyone joins for a late breakfast every day. You can't help but grow as a group. We're all living in a post-9-11 age, where there's a lot to figure out about health, fitness, finding the deepest desires of your heart, the job you are made for."

An unexpected surprise was interest from others vacationing on the cruise. Aside from the 300 who paid to be there, Tesh says that 20% of the total 4,000 on the ship ultimately also chose to take part in the program, as they sniffed out his agenda. Tesh accommodated by allowing those interested to pay an a la carte price for the various forums.

For the future, Tesh would like to sponsor at least two cruises a year, devoted to the radio show's broad range of goals. For example, a health and fitness excursion or a relationships venture.

Four years in, as the leading syndicated AC personality in the nation, he adds, "I wake up every morning and wonder, 'How did this happen?' When I started this, I didn't know the radio business at all—but as someone who used to sell CDs from his garage, I possess an entrepreneurial absence of fear. Still, I am struck by humility every day. But since we have this gift, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure it keeps happening."

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—John Tesh