

# From Sea Studies To Spanish-language Sales Success

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*RBR+TVBR INFOCUS*

SAN DIEGO — In January 2004, six years after earning a Master’s degree in marine affairs and fishery management at the University of Washington, **Sabina Widmann** took a stab at radio sales, and took a job at iHeart predecessor Clear Channel Radio.

The career choice proved to be a smart one. Fifteen years later, she’s President of a group of stations in America’s Finest City while doubling as a regional radio GM for this company’s properties in Sin City and across the Rio Grande Valley.

Perhaps her biggest achievement involves a station once known as Top 40 “Q106” in San Diego. It’s a dominant player in the market, offering regional Mexican music in a tough marketplace including many signals from Baja California, south of the border.

How has Widmann succeeded?

Her path to having one of the station under her purview, **KLNV-FM 106.5 “Qué Buena”** in San Diego, earn the 2019 Medallas de Cortez award for Station of the Year, began with her move from Clear Channel to **Univision Radio** in May 2005.

Widmann spent five years as an AE for Qué Buena and its sibling, KLQV-FM “Amor 102.9.”

She later rose to the roles of National Account Manager, Director of Sales (in July 2012), and VP/GM in August 2015.

As of June 2016 she’s been President of Univision Radio San Diego as well as Regional Radio GM for Las Vegas and McAllen-Brownsville, Tex.

*RBR+TVBR* conducted an interview with Widmann following the Hispanic Radio Conference in Miami, where KLNK was honored.

*RBR+TVBR: Qué Buena has become a standout player in a very difficult radio market for Hispanic radio — given the abundance of programming options both from Southern California and from Baja California and Tijuana. How has Qué Buena become a dominant choice, based on the latest Nielsen Audio ratings?*

SABINA WIDMANN: Qué Buena 106.5 is the only regional Mexican radio station that is programmed based on the specific tastes and preferences of the San Diego Hispanic listener. We spend a lot of time listening to our audience and finding new ways to connect with them, both on air and through social media. We understand our audience’s needs for both entertainment and news. Our on-air personalities also reflect our audience – they understand the community and are representatives of what’s happening in our region.

*RBR+TVBR: Your closest competitor is “La Invasora,” a Tijuana station with a good signal in San Diego. But, is this a San Diego station? This may be key to understanding Qué Buena’s audience growth.*

SABINA: We don’t attempt to straddle two different regions. We’re authentic to our city’s roots and our listeners’ tastes. I view our competition as all radio stations, regardless of language, since that is where Qué Buena has been able to thrive. The San

Diego population is roughly one-third Hispanic, and we're very happy to represent our audience in terms of language, culture, pride and attitude.

*RBR+TVBR: We know that regional Mexican is the top format nationwide for Hispanic radio, but how has it come to dominate San Diego? Is this a new trend, or simply emblematic of taking a popular format and providing the market with a local choice, rather than having listeners choose between four or five Mexican choices?*

SABINA: San Diego's listeners have made Qué Buena the top-rated Spanish station for 20 continuous years – month after month, book after book, year after year. Regional Mexican is mainstream! It's your preference, whether you grew up listening to *musica norteña* or if you're rediscovering your roots thanks to the newer bandas, crossover singers like **Christian Nodal**, or the timeless cumbias of **Los Ángeles Azules**.

The issue isn't so much an American choice versus a Mexican choice – it's an issue of the product – the amount of listener research that we do on a regular basis helps us best understand what our audience needs and expects from us. We're respectful of the time that they spend with us and we make sure that when they tune in, they're going to hear great music and personalities that they connect with.

*RBR+TVBR: While there is ratings success, what about billing? Are there challenges that persist in San Diego, a shadow market in many ways to Los Angeles?*

SABINA: Our biggest challenge in San Diego is that all our Spanish-language competitors are Mexican-owned companies who will increase spot load as needed, undercut rates to get on buys and do not have to follow the FCC's rules. However, what makes our Uforia station in San Diego stand apart is that we deliver: We do what we say we are going to do. Our clients trust us, both our teams and our content.

*RBR+TVBR: The strong El Bueno, La Mala y El Feo syndicated show is complemented by local talent across the rest of the day. Please share how this dynamic helps Que Buena.*

SABINA: Once again, I think it comes down to content. Raul “El Bueno,” Carla “La Mala,” and Andres Maldonado “El Feo” each bring their own identity and energy to the show. We’re very lucky to have a recognized morning show that has not only been completely embraced by San Diego’s listeners but is also the most-listened-to morning show in the market, regardless of language.

In the same way, our San Diego-focused programming outside of morning drive helps flesh out more of the station’s personality. “El Potrillo” in middays is the person that helps make your workday fly by; he’s fantastic and our listeners love his energy. During the PM drive, we have “El Jarocho y El Compaye,” that really captures a manic, fun, and natural presence. That show came from the two hosts’ lunchtime conversations – they would talk through the day’s news stories as they saw them on their phones or on TV, and go back and forth, and crack each other up. We realized that their chemistry needed to be heard by others outside of the break room! We knew the Que Buena audience would love to hear our talent be real – authentic, honest, and even crazy at times. It’s a fantastic show that really helps bookend the station.

Last, but not least, we have Alex Navarro “Ojitos.” He is someone who grew up listening to KLNv, exists in both the regional Mexican and the geek/technology/social media cultures and represents another facet of our listener during his night and weekend shifts. Our station is diverse, and at the same time, true to what our listeners’ lives are really like.

*RBR+TVBR: The Medallas de Cortez award for Station of the Year is a crowning achievement for a station many still remember as “Q106.” What does this say about Univision Radio’s leadership and of Qué Buena?*

WIDMANN: KLNv has been nominated for many prestigious awards throughout its 20-year history but being named the Station of the Year is a tremendous honor. It’s a fantastic way to top off our phenomenal 20th anniversary, and I know that the team is humbled and ecstatic.

We count Que Buena 106.5, and its sister station Amor 102.9, among the many broadcasters across the nation who are doing good work for their communities and listeners. We give thanks to [Medallas de Cortez presenter] Radio Ink and its committee, as well as to our listeners, who we proudly represent, for this recognition.