

TV Phone Votes - like Chart Hype, I started it!

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As the scandal about Phone Voting grows, I started it in the 90's with The Brits and Eurovision.

It was my idea after watching how ratings soared for Eurovision during the VOTES section.

So I adapted Song For Europe to enable viewers to vote for our entry. Then I pressurised the EBU to change the system in Eurovision so phone votes rather than a twelve person jury voted.

Not quite in time to save Gina G (most of the few countries then on phone votes gave the UK 12 points that year) but in time to win with Katrina in 1997.

Also by then I'd started the Record of the Year Shows with massive public voting and huge ratings.

You won't remember - or even believe - that ten years ago there was very little phone voting. My concepts and formats made a huge splash and, sadly - as with hyping the charts 20 years earlier - then everybody started doing it.

I remember SIMON COWELL telling me over dinner he was "stealing" the concept for his Pop Idol idea.

I swiftly went off it. When everyone was doing it, the novelty palled. I'd have stopped phone voting on the Record of the Year and substituted it for another fresh idea in 2001, if my career had not been suddenly interrupted.

Every time I hear a presenter say "phone lines are open" I groan. And it was corrupt even way back then. A very good way of making extra money.

We were using it on Radio Two to find the finalists in A Song For Europe and I stayed in the room and penalised if there was obvious hyping (from a geographical area, for example). My only desire was to find a truly popular entry - not a hyped one.

TV and Radio were much impressed but predominantly by the financial aspect. I'd started it because I was very into interactive those days - as with The Tip Sheet.

Now their chickens have come home to roost. And well deserved too.

If they - like me - had cared more about the quality of the shows, they wouldn't be in this mess today.