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Exposing Susan Russell

Interviewed by: Alex Zander

Susan Russell is no stranger to viewers of Chicago *Expose* TV. She's the hostess with the mostess, the creator of *Expose*, a Chicago produced syndicated rock 'n' roll TV show. She's got the big hair, short skirt and go-go boots. She's got the pink neon *Expose* sign and two white columns on the soundstage.

Go ahead. Admit it. You've seen it.

Susan plays off her blonde bimbo image convincingly enough that one could easily be fooled into thinking that it is all she has to offer. After surfing channels for years and seeing her "style" and or "technique" with the likes of guests such as Vince Neil, I contacted her about promoting MK as a sponsor of this last spring's United Tour.

I was impressed with her control of the entire production. You'd never know it by just watching the show but this woman is no bimbo. She is a smart, witty and determined. Above all, she knows how to work her show, running it with a firm grip.

After we taped my episode, I in turn interviewed her.

A New York native, young Ms. Russell studied at a Music and Arts school, where she fine tuned her talents. She worked as a model, an actress, and even played in a band. She continued her education at Columbia. She went on to perform in Chicago at the Randolph Street Theatre. She also performed at Sex Fest and The Blue Rider Theatre.

Alex Zander: Tell me a little about your background—where you started, how you started, and where you're from...

Susan Russell: I've done all kinds of stuff. I was in a band

way back; I played the Chicago Club Circuit—it was called T.V. Set. We played Metro, Cubby Bear, we played what is now Excalibur, that used to be the Limelight. It was a lot of fun; I played bass and synthesizer. I have done modeling. I presently work in films—I have worked in films. I'm a dancer, a musician, everything! What got me in this was when I was doing interviews for this big show out here called *Motor Sports Unlimited*. I was one of the girls in heels and feathers in the Las Vegas style out fit with hot pink leotards, cleavage, and all the guys would whistle at us when we would go to the shows, but it was lots of fun! It taught me to just go up to any perfect stranger, ask them questions, get right in there. We had to live through hours and hours of waiting around, talk to people, we had to be there in their high moments of glory, winning their trophies, and their low moments of defeat. So it really got me to be able to understand people 'cause that's the most important thing about interviewing—you don't want people to be uptight. You want people to open up and spill their heart and their soul, and if they trust you, you'll get that. So, that's what I did. Then I just got so sick and tired of doing that show, playing the bimbo, just one of the girls. I have an education and want to use my mind and have some sort of artistic control so a lot of people started to encourage me to move ahead, since I love music and have a background in it. So I went decided to do this show, and it started to be a success!

AZ: So what brought you to Chicago?

SR: What brought me to Chicago was my ex!

AZ: Classic story.

SR: He brought me here, and here I am—you know, from New York, the Big Apple. But you wanna know the truth? Once I came here I looked on the bus, I looked on the L (elevated train) and I was like, "this is like a mini New York." It's not that different. So, all of a sudden my New York spirit kind of helped me create a whole different vision because people out here didn't really come with that high speed energy that I did, but people picked up on it. My sense of fashion, my sense of energy, my whole vision from being from the craziest city in the world, New York.

AZ: What did you do when you first moved here? Were you in a band?

SR: When I first moved here I had just had my first child and I was going to art school, I went to the Art Institute. It took me forever to graduate because I was going part time and stuff like that. We were in the band, immediately playing out and playing all the clubs. After that, I was getting into my painting for a while. There I decided to finally finish my degree and then I moved on—modeling jobs, acting jobs and there I felt like I found my niche when I started doing the interviewing, because

then I'm not just playing a role even though I do enjoy acting. And it's something I'm actually good at. Today I went on an audition for a film! I'm still involved in it but I realized it was a little bit more to do really, more direct. Instead of a plot, it's more the plot of the person's life. You're learning the history of what people have gone through, what their future is, what their expectations have been, their ups and downs.

AZ: Who was the best interview for you so far?

SR: I guess my favorite has been Vince Neil and Motley Crue. He was so friendly, very cool, very laid back. We were on his tour bus; we were having a great time.

AZ: What about a bad interview?

SR: So far as the big guys, I can't say anyone was bad. The only thing I can say is that sometimes I've had local bands—guys many times are immature. They don't have the sophistication where they know, "okay, you have to respect anyone you met on the set 'cause you never know who these people are. Whether they come across as somebody out of the GQ or they could be like the mad scientist. They might be somebody who's gonna affect you along the way." And that's the thing. If you're a professional and then you know whoever you come across you have to have some kind of level or courtesy or respect. And I think sometimes I've had some bands where the guys come in a little drunk, or a little wasted or a little screwed up in the head and if you're going to come in like that, then there attitude is going to be bad. And if you have a bad attitude, that's what's going to cut you short. You can have a lot of talent but if you have a bad attitude you're not going to get anywhere in the business. If you have a good attitude, even if you're a little shy on the talent, people are gonna try. People are going to help you along. There going to tell you what you should do. They'll introduce you to someone at a party. That's what it's all about. So I guess the worst interview I've had was just someone not having a good attitude and messing with me or somebody of my staff and me having to say, "get your ass out of here!" (laughs) Because I have to play tough bitch boss lady.

AZ: This show is your idea, you pretty much direct it?

SR: I'm basically the queen bitch of it. (Laughs) I'm considered the Executive Director. I have people who give me ideas, opinions and I gotta bounce things off. I get a lot of press kits, I get a lot of e-mails, I get a lot of phone calls. A lot of people wanna be on the show. There's a jam thing. I have to cut and pick and choose. But, basically I came up with the idea. It was funny because I have a neon sign on my show, and I love neon! And neon is a little trashy (laughs). Its kind of like Vegas, or strip joints or whatever. But then I was like, "ya know what? I'm a little trashy!" (Laughs) And I was thinking, "would the cameras work out with that?" It was so wild. And I got the artist in me so I got the Jackson Pollack background and I got the fashion girl in me, so I got the retro purple bar stools. As far as creation of the show, it's all mine. I had to go ahead and I had to think to myself, "How am I going to do this? What is my format?" Many times you come up with different ideas and then I've gotta reviewed in *The Reader*, *Illinois Entertainer*, *Electronic Media*. I was in a convention in California which basically features all big names on T.V. So I was at this convention, I had a little booth and I got picked up

nationally. I'm on over 20 stations—in New York, Las Vegas, California, all over the place. It's a really exciting feeling to know that you are hitting your audience. That people are out there

and they're watching and responding. That people are like—"oh! I really like you in the miniskirt" or "I really like this..."

You have to take risks. You get a little eye candy, you get a little knowledge of what's going on. There was a time when I mixed a little more heavy duty with the intellectual, but I have kind of cut back a little now. I wanted to talk the existentialism and the philosophy, but now I wanna blend it. I want it to be entertaining, but I also want it to be informative.

AZ: What's the best way for bands get a hold of you to get on the show?

SR: A lot of people can do it through my website which is www.exposetvshow.com. People e-mail me. People send me press kits. I've got a P.O. Box. People call into the stations. People see me on the street. People just find me! What can I say?!(laughs) It's just a constant flow.

AZ: What advice do you have to someone who wants to start their own access show?

SR: I would say to go ahead and get trained. You have to know all of the technical equipment, you have to learn what it's like to actually have a concept or an idea, what you should do with that. You have to have reliable people who are willing to help you. And then you have to make sure you have the commitment, 'cause if you don't have the commitment, you are wasting your time. I have broken away from just access. That's RARE! Tom Green and other people did it too; I'm one of those rarities! (laughs) And basically it has to do with is getting good press.

AZ: Finally, I wanted to ask you how people find out when you are on? Does the website list the show times and the cities?

SR: I don't have it on at this point in the game because my webmaster did that for me just because he likes me and I thought that would be too confusing. I have a thing called "Ask Susan Russell" where people e-mail me. So depending on where they live—some nights the stations do change. Out here in Chicago it's Tuesdays at 6pm and Wednesdays at 1pm. So that's perfect. You can sit down and watch TV with your TV dinner or whatever. If you're a housewife or you work the owl shift then you can watch me at one in the afternoon. Nationally it usually airs late Saturday night, depending on where you live. It's kind of confusing, so we just leave it open for people to ask us.

AZ: So if people write to you, then you will write back to them?

SR: Yes, yes, yes! Totally. I love my fans. You can't grow without them. They're they're ones they feed you the energy. They give you everything and that's what it's all about.

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