

The Past, Present, and Future of Radio Broadcasting

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dave Smith", is written over a horizontal line.

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Purpose of Thesis

Radio is one of the world's most important means of communication. Many people accept radio's presence without questioning how it got there. This discussion of the past, present, and future of radio broadcasting is divided into three parts. The first part deals with radio's invention and its most successful years. Part two discusses the downfall of radio due to television and radio's return to success. Part three introduces some possible ideas for the future of radio broadcasting.

Script #1

Time 5:20

RADIO'S PAST

ANNOUNCER

Do you ever wonder how it is possible that you can hear my voice? Radio is one of the world's most popular means of communication. Radio allows people to send words, sounds, music, and other signals over great distances. Radio broadcasting has become one of the biggest uses of radio. Music, sports, news, interviews, and other things are often delivered by radio. Radio can be found at your home, at work, and in your car. Radio has become such an ordinary part of everyone's life that few people stop to question how radio got its place in today's society. Mike Day, the General Manager of WMRI Radio in Marion, has his theory about why radio had become so popular..

MIKE DAY

"The easy use of radio. It's always been a vehicle that could be taken anywhere and go anywhere. That's kind of a trite answer but I think that is probably one of the most..one of the main reasons."

ANNOUNCER

In this three part series, we will explore the past, present, and future of radio broadcasting. Radio works by turning sounds and signals into electromagnetic waves, or radio waves. These waves travel through air and through objects to a receiver which changes them back into the original sounds. Many people

have contributed to the creation and development of radio, but Guglielmo Marconi is often considered the father of radio. In 1895, he became the first person to send radio communication signals. Marconi offered his radio service as a means to track and communicate with ships at sea. In 1906, Reginald Fessenden became the first person to send his voice by radio. Radio quickly became a means for communication between pilots, the police, and military personnel. It would be several years before radio would become an accepted means of entertainment.

Radio broadcasting for entertainment started out as an experimental idea. No one knew that it would catch on and become so popular. There is some confusion as to what the first commercial radio station was. Some people consider station WWJ in Detroit as the first radio station. It began regular broadcasting on August 20, 1920. Others claim Pittsburgh's KDKA as the first radio station. It grew out of an experimental station that began in 1916. Regardless of which was the first station, it was evident that radio broadcasting was a hit. Stations soon sprang up all around the United States.

The federal government played a role in the development of radio broadcasting. The Radio Act of 1927, provided for a Federal Radio Commission with the authority to license stations, assign them frequencies, and regulate their power output. They were the policemen of the airwaves. The Radio Act also stated several concepts for the American system of broadcasting. Two of them were very important. One stated that the stations must operate in the public interest, convenience, and necessity.

The other concept was that the station did not own their frequency because the air belonged to all of the people.

The Golden Age of radio broadcasting began about 1925 and ended in the 1950's when television became popular. During this time, radio became a major source of family entertainment. Every night, families would gather around their home's radio to listen to comedies, adventures, music, and other forms of entertainment. Children came home from school to find programming designed to entertain them. Women listened to programs in the afternoon called soap operas because they were often sponsored by soap companies. Many famous comedians first made a name for themselves during this period of radio's history. The programs developed during this period are legendary. Some radio newscasters became almost as famous as the top entertainers. Millions of Americans would turn in to listen to the news updates of how World War II was progressing. From 1933 to 1945, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt used the radio to broadcast informal talks with the people of the country. Radio was a magical and wonderful device which brought people together to spend time with each other enjoying the many wonderful programs that radio had to offer. Mike Day feels that we will never again see a time when families come together to enjoy the programming offered by radio.

MIKE DAY

"I don't think so. I don't think whole families gather around anything for..they spend fifteen minutes for Thanksgiving dinner..and I don't think your going to see that you know."

ANNOUNCER

In part two of this series we will look at the changes in radio broadcasting since the 1950 downfall due to the introduction of television.

Script #2

Time 4:35

RADIO'S PRESENT

ANNOUNCER

Thank you for joining us for part two of our look at the past, present , and future of radio broadcasting. In this episode, we will look at how radio broadcasting was transformed after 1950, the beginning of television broadcasting.

As early as 1948, television began to rob radio of its audience. Major advertisers began to jump to the new medium of television. With them went the stars. As their ratings on the radio began to decline, the major radio performers switched to television or quit performing altogether. By the middle of the decade, many people considered network radio dead. This was the prime time, big budget, radio that had been so popular only a decade ago. Stan Sollars, a professor of telecommunications at Ball State University, explains that this was a rough time for radio stations to go through.

STAN SOLLARS

"The advertising dollars went. Mass general advertising dollars went from radio to television. And so when that happened, radio became more local than it ever had been. They were making money from the radio networks. They made a lot less money from the radio networks. 1956 was the year of living dangerously for radio. That was the worst year in terms of average finances for radio. You can't say in terms of raw dollars, but in terms

of, if you will, per station income dollars. I guess we could say that, 56, the year I was born, was the worst year for radio."

ANNOUNCER

Some thought radio broadcasting would become an unimportant communication tool with little or no audience. Radio had to reshape its image or face extinction. Slowly, radio began to change its format to give it a new audience. Each station began to rebuild itself to try and create a loyal audience. The solution was something called "formula radio."

Formula radio was radio that had different formats. Each station had a different type of music or programming that it broadcast all of the time. The first of the formulas was Top 40. The stations only broadcast the top 40 hits, records or songs that were reported in Billboard magazine's weekly chart. Soon, other formulas were created. Stations broadcast music types like rock and roll, country, and adult contemporary. Some stations switched to an all talk format. This allowed the host to talk with the listeners on-air by the phone. Other stations switched to an all news format. This was successful because it allowed for the thorough coverage of a news event or topics. The first of this type of programming was started in 1975. Through the use of these formulas, radio was able to continue growing and was still considered an important communication medium.

Another important development which helped radio begin some of its success was the increased popularity of FM radio.

FM radio had a better sound quality than AM radio. It soon passed AM radio in popularity. Mike Day talks about his reaction to the creation of FM radio.

MIKE DAY

"FM? We put on one of the first FM stations in Louisville. I remember the adapters you would put on the AM radios so that you could have an FM tuner because the car radio only had AM in it. So a lot of us went out and bought these adapters to pick up FM stations, and FMs were simply a hobby."

ANNOUNCER

Stereo broadcasting also increased the success of radio. The new stereo sound was much better than the old monophonic version. The music coming out of the radio now sounded almost like it was being performed live for the listener. Sales of radio receivers increased dramatically due to these improvements in the quality of the sound of radio broadcasting.

Today, radio is one of our nation's most important industries. Stations provide jobs for thousands of workers across the country. Businesses use the radio advertising to sell their products to the listeners. The music that the DJs play on the air help to influence the sales of albums in record stores. Radio broadcasting has an irreplaceable spot in today's society. In part three of our series we will look at the potential future for radio broadcasting. We will also look at several new innovations in both the sending and the receiving of radio signals, and we will discuss some of the new technology that will be available to radio listeners in the near future.

Script #3

Time 6:00

RADIO'S FUTURE

ANNOUNCER

Thank you for joining us for our third and final part of our look at the past, present, and future of radio broadcasting. So far we have looked at the creation and development of radio broadcasting. We have seen radio reach its highest point of success during the golden age of broadcasting. We have seen radio decline in popularity due to television, then regain its place as one of society's biggest industries. Now we will look at the potential future for radio broadcasting.

It is unknown for sure what direction radio will travel in the next few years. Still, there are several ideas that are being considered for the future of radio broadcasting.

One of the first ideas for improving radio broadcasting is a system of sending digital audio. The signal would be broken up into a digital code at the point of broadcast. It would then be sent through the air to a receiver. At the receiver, the digital signal would then be reassembled. The advantage of this is that there would be no loss of sound quality. By reassembling the sound at the receiver, you would not lose any quality as it traveled through the air. This would eliminate any static or interference as you listened to the radio. Mike Day, the General Manager of WMRI radio in Marion, thinks digital broadcasting may make AM stations sound as good as FM stations.

MIKE DAY

"What I read and study on digital, if they all went digital then AM signals and FM signals may not be a whole lot different. Do they throw in the AMs and throw out the FMs? I don't know. That might be a cure for it."

ANNOUNCER

Another idea is the creation of programming to be delivered by satellite to areas all over the world. Today this idea is already underway. Many programs are sent around the world to be broadcast in other countries. The new idea is for the programs to be live in all of the countries at the exact same time. This will require international agreements regarding the frequencies, regulation of the content of the programming, licensing, and language of the programming. As you can see, there are several big areas that will need to be worked out before there can be global broadcasting of programming. Mike day feels that satellite programming has hurt the radio broadcasting industry.

MIKE DAY

"What it has done, it has taken away jobs from people who want to get into the industry. Taken away a great training ground at small stations. Today, even at Marion, Indiana, we have a real tough time hiring a competent announcer who can speak."

ANNOUNCER

Another concept that will be put into development for radio broadcasting is the use of LED displays in the automobile or home. While you are listening to the radio broadcast, a little LED screen will be displaying messages to the listener. These

messages could be news updates, or possibly advertising from the station, or the station's sponsors. Mike Day points out that LED displays already exist.

MIKE DAY

"We've been doing that for four years at WMRI. We have radios with Delco that we have LED. We can give you messages. We can give you paging. We can give you weather information. We can give you information. In fact, we just got it shut down yesterday for some testing and for revamping it for some more information and putting some new chips in it. We've been doing this for years."

ANNOUNCER

One idea for radio broadcasting is to put a little satellite dish onto every automobile in the country. Then broadcasters will create a national network that everyone will be able to receive through their little dish. All of these people will be linked through this one network. The programming and advertising offered on this network would have a big influence on a majority of the countries' population. There would be few people in the country who would not be affected by the programming on this national satellite network.

No one knows for sure what radio's future will hold. Stan Sollars, a professor of telecommunication at Ball State University, sees a good future for radio broadcasting.

STAN SOLLARS

"I foresee for radio still a healthier future. You see, it's all communication. Communication means commonness. Having

something in common from the sender to the receiver. So, as long as we have something entertaining to say, and that means educational as well, conveyed by personalities who have something to say, and people want to hear it. Or even if they don't want to hear it, they might hear it and say 'yeah that's something I need to know.' So long as we're doing that for people, whatever the medium, I think that radio as an industry will be OK."

ANNOUNCER

One thing is certain, radio is here to stay. Radio plays a huge role in a person's everyday life. Radio broadcasting reaches into the home, the job, and the car. Everywhere you go, the airwaves are filled with the sounds of radio programming. No matter what shape or form radio may take on, it is evident that it will play a huge role in everyone's daily life, and radio will continue to put out an entertaining product for the listener. Thank you for joining us for our three part look at the past, present, and the future of radio broadcasting.

For my senior thesis, I wanted to explore a topic that had a special meaning for me. Radio had been a huge part of my college life, and that seemed like a good idea to me. My involvement at the campus station, WCRD, has allowed me to see behind the scenes what goes into putting a radio station on the air. I realized that many people take for granted how a radio station works. It has become such an accepted part of everyday life, that few people question how radio got its place in today's society.

I decided the best way to do this would be to create a documentary on the past, present, and future of radio broadcasting. The amount of information that I would be researching would be so huge, that I decided to split my project into three parts. Each part would deal with one of the aspects of my thesis. I also wanted to interview people in the radio industry to get their views on radio's impact. Finally, once I had written and recorded my three parts, I wanted the final draft to be played on the air at WCRD.

The first step was to begin the research process of my thesis. I began to search the resources of the Ball State library to discover the past of radio. Once I had my information, I was able to begin writing my scripts and forming my questions to ask in my interviews.

I had some trouble finding some people to interview for my project. People in the radio industry are usually so busy, that it becomes difficult to schedule a time to speak with them.

I finally found two gentlemen who were willing to speak with me. Mike Day is the General Manager of WMRI radio in Marion. I drove to Marion one morning and spoke with him about the radio business. Stan Sollars is a professor of telecommunications at Ball State University. He met with me one afternoon to talk about his views of the radio industry. Their interesting insights and opinions are what made this thesis entertaining.

Once I had the scripts written, and the interviews recorded, the final step was to put it all together. It took me about ten hours of lab time to record the three parts of my thesis and to make copies of it.

Finally, I got what I had wished for when I began my thesis. The three parts of my thesis were played on WCRD. On Sunday, April 26, I got to hear my thesis on the radio. This was a tremendous thrill for me since I put so much work into creating the project.

In all, I learned that radio has had a long and complex history. It has been to the top, and had that taken away from it. Today, radio has carved its own unique place into today's society. It is unknown what the future will hold for radio. One thing is for certain, radio will continue to have a huge impact for millions of people.

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