

## THEY WONDER WHAT WENT WRONG

by Max Turner

Yes, the economy tanked, we all know that, but business goes on. Seems the majority of broadcasters have opted to replace their product with computers or programming from the sky, but that's all wrong.

What made radio was its live-local material. Clear Channel's new idea of doing away with people, even engineers, makes no sense to me. Their so called "Emergency Center" may be able to dispatch someone when a station is off the air, or run an EAS alert, but it won't tell the audience about the gas leak that just forced the evacuation of a school or other such local calamity. Just this week my wife was driving home and heard the announcer on a local station, say it was raining and 42 degrees. It was obviously voice-tracked because it was sunny and 72. What happened to that part of the station license that says "serve the public?" I would think running stations unattended, opens the door for someone to file against the current owner.

IBOC is yet another disaster. As people go out the door by the hundreds, the higher electric bills continue to run IBOC transmission systems that a teeny audience receives, why bother. Let's face it, in this economy, buying an IBOC radio is a luxury. That doesn't even take into account the lack of programming running on that wasted power. Being an engineer, I watched our power bills nearly double at the transmitter sites due to the extra air conditioning and the great analog transmitter suddenly becoming a world class heater running in hybrid mode.

One thing that can't go unnoticed is, while maintenance is bypassed, people are let go and cap-ex spending is halted, the presidents have no problem with their multi-million dollar bonuses. That leads me to think some companies who have asked for people to take unpaid time off or got booted while the bosses take the cash, aren't ready to file for protection in court.

All of the "gut" is gone. Radio is programmed by computer and the so-called jocks that read what they are told while voice tracking don't make it local. What happened to playing a song that your gut says others will like and cracking a joke you think is funny. It was "gut feeling" that made many great stations. Bean counters or stock holders are so focused on the bottom line this month, that they don't see the bottom line next month or a year from now. We used to plan five years out and work toward goals. That worked thanks to real radio operators. They cared about their people and their stations and managed to serve the public. In fact serving the customer (audience), is what allowed us to make huge profits.

In the current environment, radio people are reduced to workers. Companies that treat their talent as talented folks, reap the reward of loyalty. I have to look back at when Cumulus took over Susquehanna. What was the first thing that happened? The brain trust that made it worth so much was first out the door. All that was left was brick and mortar. It was the intellectual property that made up the value. By the way, I am not singling out one company; I am seeing this across the big board.

So what went wrong? Damn near everything. People gone, equipment failing, stations not entertaining or informative, no new investment in anything. It hurts those of us who really had a passion for the business, to find we don't even care to listen anymore.

I guess I am enjoying my computer and MP3 player more and more.

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