

RTN DA

OCTOBER 2005

# Communicator

THE MAGAZINE FOR ELECTRONIC JOURNALISTS

  
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KATRINA**  
GETTING THE STORY OUT

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RTNDA October 2005 Vol. 59, No. 9

# Communicator

THE MAGAZINE FOR ELECTRONIC JOURNALISTS



28



## ON THE COVER

Destruction from Hurricane Katrina affected not only the town of Gulfport, MS, shown here on August 31, but area stations trying to cover the storm.

Photo: AP Photo/David J. Phillip

RTNDA thanks the Associated Press for the Katrina-related images in this issue.

## FEATURES

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BY DEBORAH POTTER

Would you let area bloggers into the studio? How about inviting the chief of police to editorial meetings? News managers are looking to new and tried-and-true ways to get audience feedback.

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BY MICHELLE LEVANDER AND JACKIE JUDD

A strong dose of health care reporting can be the perfect cure for television news. Learn how to adapt successful models to your market.



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BY BOB PAPPER

The amount of news and the staff covering it grew in the past year, but there are cautionary signs ahead in the RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey.

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# Newsbreak

## INDUSTRY NEWS

### 'A Family Effort'

#### How Local TV and Radio Stayed on the Air After Katrina

An epic disaster brought out unprecedented coverage by local television and radio newsrooms along the Gulf Coast even as the stations and employees were hit hard by the fury of Hurricane Katrina. Thanks to dedicated staffs, careful planning, creative responses to tough obstacles and cooperation between stations and within broadcast groups, the stations continued to serve their communities with news and information.

Forced to abandon their building in the French Quarter, Belo's WWL-TV was the only New Orleans TV station able to stay on the air throughout the hurricane. Executive news director Sandy Breland and her staff had a plan. When most of the station's news and production employees were forced to relocate to Baton Rouge, they were able to continue coverage from Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication. Fiber optic lines linked the newsroom to the transmitter some 70 miles away. On the Wednesday after the disaster the station shifted operations to WLPB-TV. The CBS affiliate's news is now being carried for one hour on the PBS station and on other PBS stations in the state.

In Biloxi, MS, Liberty's WLOX-TV also stayed on the air even though the newsroom roof was ripped off in the

swath of Katrina. The station sits one block from the Gulf. News director and station manager Dave Vincent says the newscast continued in a hallway, with a card table as an anchor desk and a computer monitor to track the hurricane.

Heavily damaged by Hurricane Camille in 1969, WLOX had relocated its transmitter 40 miles north of Biloxi. Still, there were problems with the transmitter's emergency generator. When a water pump broke and the generator needed repair, Fox affiliate WXXV-TV carried WLOX's news for several hours.

The staff of Hearst Argyle's WDSU-TV, with the station off the air, was forced to flee New Orleans to co-owned WAPT-TV in Jackson, MS, and WESH-TV in Orlando, FL. President and general manager Mason Granger lead the coordination of broadcasting continuously with producers and anchors in two dif-

ferent newsrooms. At first, the NBC affiliate was on the Internet. Within a week, it was on the air using the transmitter of New Orleans' Pax affiliate WPXL-TV. News director Anzio Williams led a team of reporters and photographers back into their dry New Orleans newsroom to cover the devastated city.

Hearst Argyle news vice president Candy Altman credits the disaster plan for getting everyone in place and making a major difference, and the satellite transponders that allowed for the complex coverage.

WGNO-TV, the Tribune-owned ABC affiliate in New Orleans, also executed a planned evacuation to Baton Rouge. There, the stations' staff worked with WBRZ-TV, an ABC affiliate owned by Manship, to provide hurricane coverage. Cissy Baker, vice president for news operations of the Tribune stations, had high praise for



**Volunteer crews rescue the Taylor family on Monday, August 28, in Bay St. Louis, MS.**

WBRZ. "They have been fabulous to us. They welcomed us, housed us, and helped feed us."

Before the hurricane, Fox affiliate WVUE-TV sent its staff to co-owned WALA-TV in Mobile. On the edge of Katrina's path, WALA did not go off the air during the storm. WVUE has been covering the aftermath from Mobile. Emmis Communications news vice president Kim Montour says Emmis has created a separate newsroom for WVUE in Mobile and that the station plans to be broadcasting on a low-power transmitter in New Orleans within a week.

WDSU, WWL and WGNO all



**Left: Art Bailey searches for anything salvageable 10 days after Hurricane Katrina obliterated his home in Waveland, MS. Above: Flooding in New Orleans' 9th Ward on August 30.**

AP Photo/Ben Sitar; AP Photo/News & Observer; Chuck Liddy; AP Photo/Pool/Bill Ferg; The Advocate



provided continuous news coverage for broadcast in other markets, on cable systems and on satellite providers. WWL's live coverage for broadcast on digital multicast channels was picked up in markets as far away as Boston. WDSU's continuous broadcasts were also seen on Houston's KPXB-TV.

Radio stations continued their long tradition of community service in disasters. WWL-AM received national media attention for staying on the air throughout the storm and airing strongly worded statements from New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin. In addition to providing a platform for local officials, the station acted as a community bulletin board, keeping evacuees informed and trying to linkup the missing. The Entercom station was forced to abandon its studios and relocate to the Jefferson Parish Emergency Operations Center and a Clear Channel station in Baton Rouge. WWL's signal was distributed by satellite and rebroadcast throughout the state and region by stations calling themselves United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans.

Continuous television

newscasts by WWL and WLOX were carried on several Louisiana and Gulf Coast radio stations as well.

Group owners poured resources into helping their Gulf Coast and New Orleans stations. Belo, Hearst Argyle, Tribune and Emmis stations have sent satellite trucks and supplies to help their stations cope. The broadcast groups also sent reporters, photographers, producers, production and engineering people to relieve exhausted station staff who had been broadcasting around the clock before the hurricane came ashore.

With Tribune trucks, helicopters, equipment and personnel scattered throughout the country, Baker says, "It's been a family effort."

And one that's worth it for WLOX's Vincent, who says Katrina was his seventh or eighth hurricane in his 29 years at the station. "The sacrifice and dedication mean so much when people send emails or stop me and the newspeople on the street to say, 'Thank you for saving my life.'" —Dow Smith is associate professor and broadcast journalism director at Syracuse University.

## INDUSTRY NEWS

# University Lends a Helping Hand

In Baton Rouge on Saturday, August 27, faculty, staff and graduate students of Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication mingled at Dave Kurpius' home. Over tandoori chicken, they talked about the new school year and the hurricane that appeared to be turning in a safe direction. Kurpius, the school's associate dean, thought he wouldn't get the call he had worried about.

But hours later, it came. WWL-TV was bailing out of New Orleans. Staffers were on their way to LSU, following a plan put into place a year earlier, when WWL's execs saw the challenges stations faced in Florida storms.

Knowing the station was in an area vulnerable to flooding in a storm, they identified LSU as an emergency back-up broadcast site.

By Sunday afternoon, Kurpius, a former TV news director, was greeting the first wave of staff from WWL and other Belo facilities. A satellite truck from KHOU-TV in Houston became the broadcast lifeline for WWL's newscast.

The Manship School boasts a state-of-the-art news studio. While professionals re-

configured it to align with the satellite truck specifications, students showed up to help.

Kurpius watched students turn into teachers, schooling the refugee broadcasters on the schools' graphics system and switcher. When WWL took to the air at 9:30 Sunday night, they ran studio cameras and helped cover stories.

"When I told the chancellor



**WWL and Times-Picayune staff work in the control room set up at LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication.**

(Sean O'Keefe) that WWL might be coming, he said, 'Let us know, we'll give them everything they need,'" said Kurpius.

They needed plenty. The estimated 100 staffers from Belo were joined by CNN crews, then several dozen journalists from *The Times-Picayune*. The New Orleans newspaper crew moved into the school's computer lab to publish the web edition of the paper.



KHOU's satellite truck helped WWL stay on the air continuously.

As of Wednesday afternoon, university dining services had been serving breakfast, lunch and dinner to the crews, then dropping by with bottled water and coffee. Kurpius lined up dorm rooms for weary workers, while others caught rest in classrooms and even the news studio. Because they are working round-the-clock, the journalists simply rotate through the available dorm rooms.

But the university did more. Aware that many of those on duty left families and devastated homes behind, LSU brought in counselors. The school's Pete

Maravich Assembly Center became a triage point for people being brought in by land and air from Louisiana parishes. The indoor track and field center became a special needs shelter for Katrina's casualties.

Kurpius understands the critical role of information for those victims and their families, and how the university's role as a safe haven for journalists provides an essential service in critical times.

"As a public institution, it's our responsibility to help in

any way we can," says Kurpius. "And I'd hope that any other school in the same situation would do the same."

On Thursday, September 1, WWL moved to WLPB-TV where executive producer Mikel Schaefer expects to stay until they return to New Orleans.

"Simply put, we moved because of technical limitations," says Schaefer, "but let

me preface that by saying the LSU Manship School of Mass Communication has been and will continue to be a phenomenal relationship for us. We spent an unparalleled few days there, unparalleled in journalism. They were able to provide us with the ability in the worst conditions to keep us on the air, providing vital, lifesaving and life-changing information to the people of south Louisiana. —Jill Geisler heads the leadership and management group at The Poynter Institute. This article was adapted from a column that appeared on [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org).

INDUSTRY NEWS

# Katrina and the Web

With transmitters under water and newsrooms evacuated, journalists who call the Gulf Coast home turned to the Internet to share the latest news about Hurricane Katrina and its wide path of devastation.

Live, round-the-clock online video streams supplanted several stations' over-the-air signals. Reporters' blogs, at times updated every few minutes, replaced wrap-up stories. Dramatic, on-the-scene photos and videos from "citizen journalists" supplemented the work of professionals.

Media sites across the region were generally unaffected by the storm because most are hosted by parent companies or other service providers far from the Gulf. Many who had evacuated the area looked to the web for immediate, detailed information, down to

the neighborhood, that they couldn't get from the national media coverage.

Local media in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama launched blogs to track developments. NOLA.com, produced by *The Times-Picayune*, became a national resource for the latest breaking news, integrating its own reporters' dispatches with updates from radio and television interviews, as well as eyewitness reports from citizens.

Television stations maintained 24-hour blogs as well, providing quick bits of information from their reporters in the field. The national news networks also launched their own correspondent blogs, delivering additional first-person perspectives of the drama.

Local and national media websites reported record traffic numbers. During the week



WDSU-TV provided live coverage through video streams on its website.

after the storm, WDSU.com, which for days was the only way to watch Hearst-Argyle's New Orleans affiliate, served nearly 2 million video streams of the station's live coverage.

Belo's New Orleans station, CBS-powerhouse WWL-TV (which was able to maintain its over-the-air signal) reported web traffic more than 35 times its average. Links to WWL's live stream could be found on CBSNews.com and dozens of other media and personal sites, including Yahoo!'s Hurricane Katrina coverage.

Several sites provided individual links to message boards and entries about specific

counties, parishes and neighborhoods. Just a week after the storm hit, the St. Bernard/Plaquemines section on NOLA.com showed more than

22,000 postings.

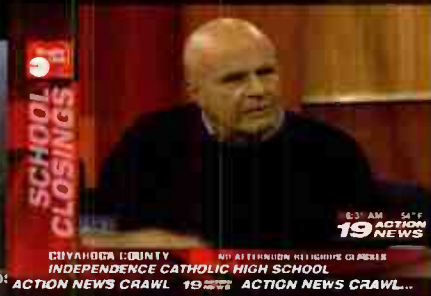
Sites in other markets provided resources for displaced evacuees. KHOU.com in Houston, for example, stripped more than two dozen helpful links across the top of its site including FEMA financial aid, job postings, housing connections, volunteer and donation information, sites to search for the missing, and video interviews with "those seeking loved ones."

Media companies also used their local sites to reach out to displaced and unaccounted-for employees.—Lane Beauchamp is managing editor at Viacom Television Stations Digital Media Group.



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# News Director Swap

A two-week experiment sends six news directors in different directions.

Reality TV succeeds with not one, but two, programs about swapping wives. Could the same lessons, and hilarity, ensue from swapping television news directors?

Post-Newsweek group CEO Alan Frank came up with the concept and, with the help of VP/news Deborah Collura, put the experiment into motion, assigning six news directors to different stations for two weeks.

Read the reflections of all six news directors on swapping stations, territorial weather dogs and all.—Sarah Stump

**Neil Goldstein**  
**WDIV-TV, Detroit, to**  
**KPRC-TV, Houston**

"There's something I need to mention," Nancy Shafran says a few weeks before I go to KPRC. "One of the biggest 'stars' at the station, in the market, is Radar." He's their on-air weather dog. He lives at the station. Mostly in the news director's office. He's a dog. I like dogs. I've had a few. We got along fine.

Day one, on the way to the station, there it is. A huge billboard along the highway with Radar's adorable shaggy head the size of a hot air balloon. In I go. As my eyes scan the cavernous newsroom, where is Radar? Assistant news director Rick McFarland and Radar approach cautiously. Generally unleashed, Radar is now very leashed. He's wagging his tail. I reach out my

hand for him to get a good get-to-know-me sniff. Tail still wagging. The newsroom watches breathlessly.

And then it happens—the thing that will be talked about throughout my stay. Radar acts like a dog and snaps at me. Not a big snap, but enough to reel me back a few steps. It's the snap that will be heard around the company. Uh oh, what now? It's him or me and he's the star. I do what any news director would like to do when tough talent snaps at them—I lock him in his sleeping crate. He growls at me all day.

Day two, and I am determined to conquer the beast. I reach into the giant jar of dog biscuits sitting on Nancy's desk. Radar is staring at my hand. Or is it the biscuit? Slowly, slowly, slowly I reach out. He cranes his neck forward. He takes the bribe. Gently. And then Rick lets go of the leash. Friends. And at that moment I learned a valuable management lesson regarding talent negotiations. If I reveal it here, it will certainly be used against me by some snarling agent. Let's just say biscuits are involved, and leave it at that.

**Nancy Shafran**  
**KPRC-TV, Houston, to**  
**WPLG-TV, Miami**

All of us approached the assignment not sure what to expect. None of us really want-

ed to be away from our own station for that amount of time. We weren't sure how our new staff would embrace us, or we them. We had all kinds of reasons why it wouldn't work. But knowing it was Alan's idea, we all headed off to "camp."

At Camp WPLG, we had the Miami Heat playoffs, a tropical storm, an airline emergency, plus the usual news of the day. My goal was to see how the folks at this very successful ABC affiliate approached the day and executed their mission. As a newcomer to the market, I saw stories with fresh eyes and rundowns with more of a viewer's perspective.

When all was said and done, it was an incredibly positive professional experience for me. My biggest surprise may have been that there were so many similarities between the Miami newsroom and mine.

Camp WPLG taught me to look at my newsroom like a

newcomer would look at it. My two weeks in Miami forced me in a short amount of time to "size up" my new staff. It was similar to a new news director walking into a newsroom for the first time. When I got back to Houston I took that lesson with me. It is one I never want to forget.

**Bill Pohovey**  
**WPLG-TV, Miami, to**  
**WKMG-TV, Orlando, FL**

Sure, I occasionally watch reality TV shows, but I would never audition for one. So when Deborah Collura had a conference call to announce the Post-Newsweek News Director Swap, I suddenly felt like a reluctant contestant, being forced into a Wife Swap episode for two weeks.

After the idea settled in, I packed my bags and headed to Orlando. WKMG is a station with a great sense of pride and enthusiasm. The newsroom staff is hungry and has a win-





ning attitude. The newsgathering process and the quality of the product are impressive. So is the territory WKMG must cover—Central Florida goes on and on and on.

Both WKMG and WPLG devote great resources to our Problem Solver units. WKMG inspired me to make some productive changes to our unit upon my return to Miami. I also took away some ideas about weather coverage and weather graphics. Orlando was also a good fit for my “swap” since our Miami and Orlando stations often share resources, especially during Florida hurricane coverage.

As much as we may not like it, sometimes it’s good to be forced from the comfort zone, to see different ways to do things and get differing opinions from those who really make a newsroom run.

**Skip Valet**  
**WKMG-TV, Orlando, FL, to**  
**WDIV-TV, Detroit**

While everyone at WDIV knew

the swap was temporary, I felt emotionally involved from the moment I walked into the newsroom. There was the same competitive fire I feel at WKMG, the satisfaction from success and the aggravation when things didn’t go well.

WDIV’s news team covered stories from breaking weather to the city budget crisis to GM layoffs to the Pistons’ run at defending the NBA title, all of which provided a great opportunity to learn a lot about a great news town. The employees of WDIV embraced the swap idea, and their attitude and spirit made my job a whole lot easier.

I wanted to go into the swap free to make my own evaluations, so I purposely had no conversation about WDIV’s newsroom with any of the news managers before I arrived. I did, however, learn as much as I could about Detroit and the news there before my first day.

I filled up a notebook of WDIV ideas that might help my newsroom. I shared

thoughts with them about things that work at WKMG. I also spent a lot of time thinking about what my next steps need to be in Orlando.

During the two weeks, life went on for the station and, as decisions were made and future plans laid out, my opinion was not only valued but often demanded.

**Jim Boyle**  
**KSAT-TV, San Antonio, to**  
**WJXT-TV, Jacksonville, FL**

I felt right at home the first day I walked into the WJXT newsroom. That says something, since I haven’t worked in another newsroom for more than 20 years.

I approached this swap as if I were showing up for work as WJXT’s “new” news director. I spent my first few days on a fact-finding mission, meeting as many of the staff as I could, listening closely to what was being said in the story meetings, watching newscasts and asking lots of questions.

Like KSAT, the WJXT news staff understands the market. They have a good collective memory. They realize that strong, local content is the key to winning. They know how to wrap their arms around a lead story. The entire station places a high priority on being first to cover breaking news whether local or national. And they make it all happen with resources that are stretched to the limit to produce eight hours of news a day.

With grit and determination, WJXT has made the transition from a very successful CBS affiliate to a very successful independent station inside of three years. As I left WJXT, I

realized that their success gives hope to all of us working in local television news who wonder what the future would be like if our network pulled the affiliation plug.

**Maureen Ruddy**  
**WJXT-TV, Jacksonville, to**  
**KSAT-TV, San Antonio**

When we first learned of Alan’s idea, let’s be honest, we all thought, ‘He’s watching too many reality shows. What the heck is he thinking?’

Turns out, Alan was thinking about a great opportunity for us and for the company.

Arriving in San Antonio during the NBA Conference Finals was quite an eye-opener. If everything’s big in Texas, know that basketball is huge in San Antonio.

On my first day on the job, I wanted to sit back and watch. But this experiment was at an accelerated pace, so I jumped into things pretty quickly. Like any news director in a new newsroom, the adrenaline started pumping and the ideas started flowing.

I enjoyed watching the KSAT team in action. I also enjoyed bringing them some new ideas. There was a great deal of give and take that resulted in a lot of learning. KSAT is a well-run station with an extremely competitive newsroom.

The time spent at KSAT was only part of the experiment. I was more than eager to get back to my shop and share. Perhaps more importantly, I was also able to have a fresh look at what I am doing here at WJXT and honestly evaluate what is working and what needs fixing.

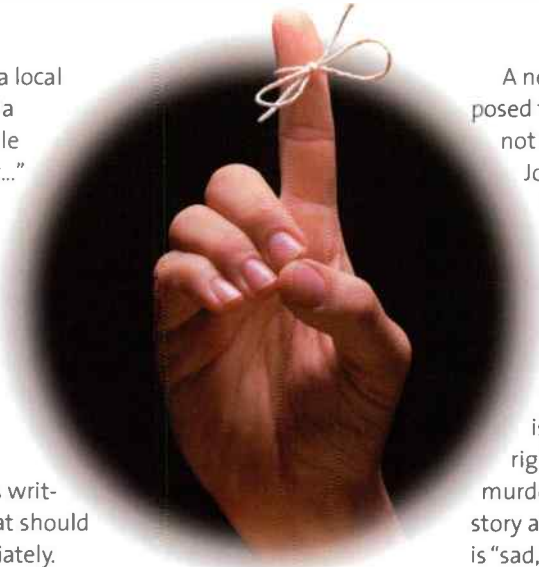
## TRADE SECRETS

# Brutal, Glorious, Heartbreaking, Tragic

Remember: It's time to break away from all the adjectives in newswriting.

"A tragic accident on a local freeway..." "Police say a teenager is responsible for the brutal murder..." "Now to a sad story about an elderly..." "A local community is outraged tonight..."

How often do you see adjectives overly used in news copy? It is a common practice among news writers and producers that should be dealt with immediately.



A newswriter is only supposed to present the facts, not sensationalize them.

Journalists are obligated to provide viewers with honest information, not to manipulate their way of thinking.

Let the viewer decide if an accident is "tragic," if a murder is "brutal" (as if there's a right or wrong way to murder someone), if the story about an elderly woman is "sad," and if the community

is indeed "outraged."

The copy, sound and pictures should speak for themselves. This is where good writing and video are crucial to telling a story. Write to the pictures. The television news audience is absolutely capable of figuring out the tone and overall feeling of the stories we broadcast. A personal stance and interpretation of a situation should not be evident in news copy.—Aaron Day is a newswriter at KFMB-TV in San Diego.

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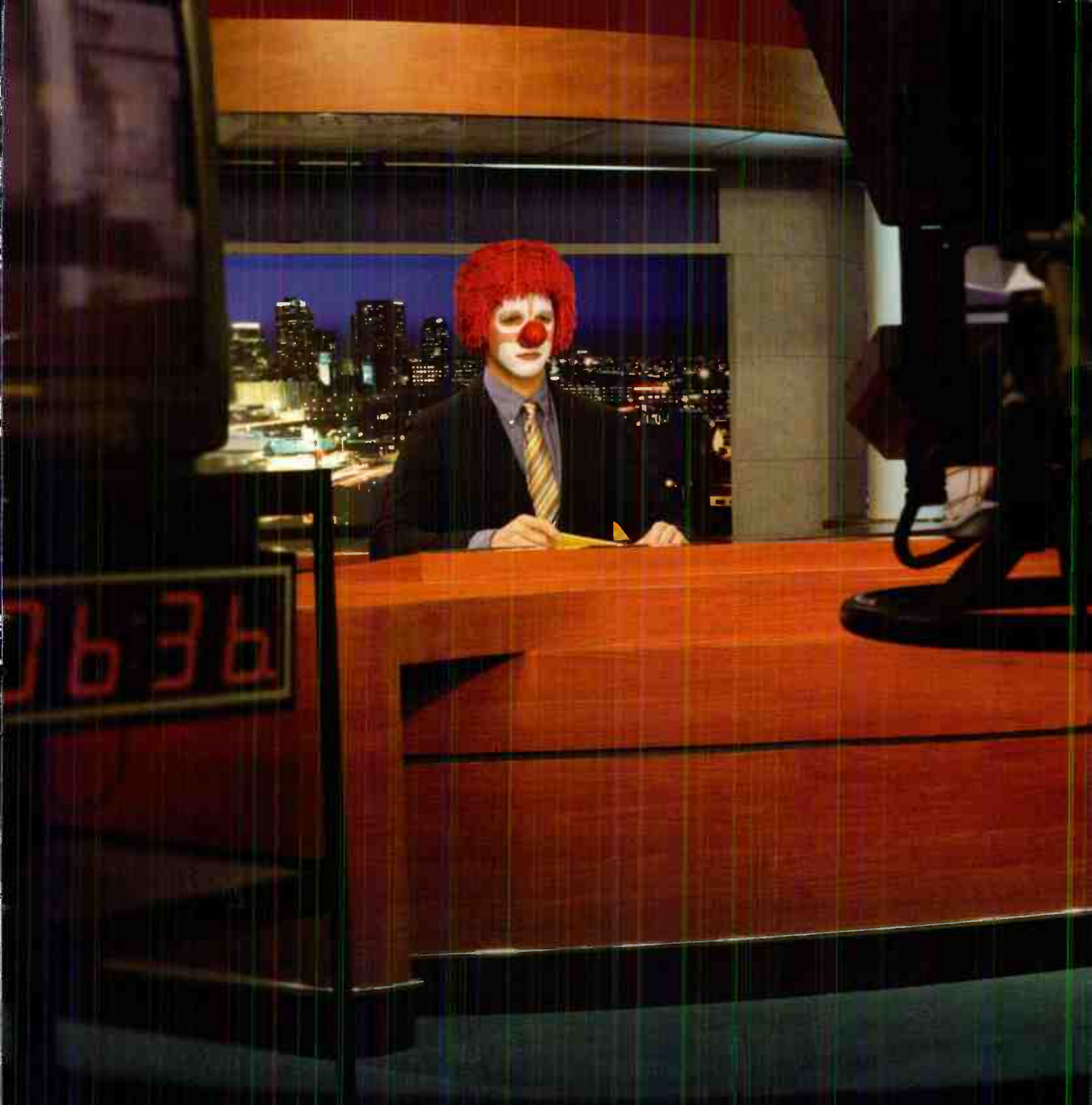
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# Names in the News

## Job Changes

**Carl Abraham** promoted to assistant news director from assignment manager, WNEP-TV, Wilkes-Barre, PA.

**Kristen Abraham** promoted to news director, WFQX-TV, Traverse City/Cadillac, MI.

**Karen Anderson** promoted to reporter/anchor from freelance reporter, WBZ-TV, Boston.

**Kristin Kodama Anderson** to producer, KPIX-TV, San Francisco, from KOMO-TV, Seattle.

**Dionne Anglin** to reporter, KDFW-TV, Dallas, from KENS-TV, San Antonio.

**Mike Avery** to reporter/anchor, WXMI-TV, Grand Rapids, MI, from WJCL/WTGS-TV, Savannah, GA.

**Sonia Baghdady** promoted to anchor/reporter from anchor, WTNH-TV, New Haven, CT.

**Jim Barach** to chief meteorologist, WCHS/WHAV-TV, Charleston, WV.

**Nico Belha** to anchor, WGHP-TV, High Point, NC, from reporter, KTVM-TV, Bozeman, MT.

**Joel Bernell** to assistant news director, WISC-TV, Madison, WI, from news director, WGBA-TV, Green Bay, WI.

**Jennifer Bernard** to production assistant, WFAN-AM, Astoria, NY.

**Eric Braun** to VP and managing director, Associated Press, London, from vice president, Raycom Media.

**Gary Brown** to news director, WFSB-TV, Hartford, CT, from WPRI-TV, Providence, RI.

**Scott Burton** to reporter, KGW-TV, Portland, OR, from KTNV-TV, Las Vegas.

**Tony Castrilli** promoted to

executive producer from managing editor, WUSA-TV, Washington.

**Lisa Chan** promoted to anchor from reporter, KBHK-TV, San Francisco.

**Arthur Chi'en** to reporter, WPIX-TV, from WCBS-TV, both in New York.

**Renee Charles** to anchor/reporter, WKYT-TV, Lexington, KY.

**Dray Clark** to reporter, WJW-TV, Cleveland, from WOOD-TV, Grand Rapids, MI.

**Jim Collins** to producer/editor, WTMJ-TV, from freelance producer, WISN-TV, both in Milwaukee.

**Joel Connable** to reporter/anchor, WTVJ-TV, Miami, from reporter, KCBS/KCAL-TV, Los Angeles.

**Alex Crippen** promoted to executive producer, CNBC, New York.

**Ken Curtis** to news director, WDHN-TV, Dothan, AL.

**Lindsay Czarniak** to anchor/reporter, WRC-TV, Washington, from WTVJ-TV, Miami.

**Rich DeMuro** to reporter/anchor, Channel One, Los Angeles, from reporter, KTAL-TV, Shreveport, LA.

**Josh DeVine** to reporter, WJRT-TV, Flint, MI, from anchor/reporter, WBOY-TV, Clarksburg, WV.

**Dave Elliott** to anchor/host, WGUF-FM, Naples, FL, from WINK/WNOG-AM, Fort Myers, FL.

**Kristin Espeland** to anchor, Wyoming Public Radio, Laramie, WY.

**Sandra Golden** to anchor/reporter, Falcons Radio

Network, Atlanta.

**Terry Graham** to news director and anchor, WFXL-TV, Albany, GA, from WMDN-TV, Meridian, MS.

**Molly Grantham** promoted to anchor/reporter, WBTV, Charlotte, NC.

▲ **Katie Hammond** to producer, WKRQ-TV, from WALA-TV, both in Mobile, AL.

**David Hart** to news director, WBTW-TV, Florence, SC, from executive producer, WSPA-TV, Spartanburg, SC.

**Eleanor Hayes** to anchor/reporter, Ohio News Network, Columbus, OH.

**Jason Heath** to news director, WRTV, Indianapolis, from assistant news director, WVIT-TV, Hartford, CT.

**Adam Henning** to news director, WWAY-TV, Wilmington, NC, from WCJB-TV, Gainesville, FL.

**Craig Herrera** to meteorologist, KNTV, San Jose, from KFSN-TV, Fresno.

▲ **Jack Hurley** promoted to senior VP from VP, Freedom Forum, Arlington, VA.

**Sheinelle Jones** to reporter/anchor, WTXF-TV, Philadelphia, from KOKI-TV, Tulsa, OK.

**Nichelle King** to reporter/anchor, WHDH-TV, Boston, from reporter, WSVN-TV, Miami.

**Dave Kirkland** to assistant news director, WCNC-TV, Charlotte, NC, from managing editor, KRON-TV, San Francisco.

**Ed Kosowski** to executive producer, CNBC, New York, from news director, KHDH-TV, Boston.

**Brian Kowalenko** to produc-



▲ Katie Hammond



▲ Jack Hurley



▲ Jim Lemon



▲ Jillian Mauro

Compiled by Melanie Lo. Send information for Names in the News to [names@rtnda.org](mailto:names@rtnda.org).

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## Names in the News

tion assistant, WVIT-TV, West Hartford, CT, from student, Quinnipiac University.

**Carla Kreegar** to news director, KCAU-TV, from news director, KTIV-TV, both in Sioux City, IA.

**Dave Krisanda** to executive producer, WNEP-TV, Wilkes-Barre, PA.

**Tim Larson** to GM, KIFI-TV, Idaho Falls, ID, from news director, WRTV, Indianapolis.

**Rich Lebenson** to news director, WVEC-TV, Norfolk, VA, from KREM-TV, Spokane, WA.

**Kim Lehman** to anchor/reporter, WSFX/WECT-TV, Wilmington, NC.

▲ **Jim Lemon** to news director, WITI-TV, Milwaukee, from KOVR-TV, Sacramento, CA.

**Lolita Lopez** to anchor, WPIX-TV, New York.

**Michael Marsh** to anchor/reporter, WBRZ-TV, Baton Rouge, LA.

**Allen Martin** to anchor, KPIX-TV, San Francisco.

▲ **Jillian Mauro** to anchor/reporter, WLAD-AM, Danbury, CT, from student, Hofstra University.

**Melissa McCarty** to reporter/anchor, KTNV-TV, Las Vegas, from KAMR-TV, Amarillo, TX.

**Sean McClelland** to news director, KEZI-TV, Eugene, OR, from assistant news director, KPSP-TV, Palm Springs, FL.

**Carrie McClure** to reporter/anchor, KUSA-TV, Denver, from reporter, WMC-TV, Memphis, TN.

**Kelly McCullen** to reporter/producer, WUNC-TV,

Raleigh-Durham, NC.

**Todd Meany** promoted to anchor from reporter, WJW-TV, Cleveland.

**William Meyl** to GM, WGGB-TV, Springfield, MA, from KCAU-TV, Sioux City, IA.

**Linda Miele** promoted to news director from assistant news director, WHDH-TV, Boston.

**Sharon Miranda** to reporter, WEVA-TV/Univision, Tampa, FL, from student, University of South Florida.

**Sarah Nakasone** to correspondent, Belo Capital Bureau, Washington, from reporter, WNCN-TV, Raleigh, NC.

**Tom Negovan** to anchor/reporter, WGN-TV, Chicago, from anchor, KYW-TV, Philadelphia.

**Perri Peltz** to anchor, WNBC-TV, New York.

**Joe Pequeno** to reporter, KPNX-TV, Phoenix, from KARK-TV, Little Rock, AR.

**Dave Pignanelli** to assistant director, WKSU-FM, Kent, OH, from director, WCPM-FM, Cleveland.

**Jerry Post** promoted to news director, KXLY-TV, Spokane, WA.

**Matt Quayle** promoted to executive producer, CNBC, New York.

**Steve Raleigh** to meteorologist, WCPO-TV, Cincinnati, from KRON-TV, San Francisco.

**Valerie Roberts** to executive producer, WFAA-TV, Dallas, from managing editor, WXYZ-TV, Detroit.

**Lee Merrit Rosenthal** to producer, WFTS-TV, Tampa, FL, from executive producer/

anchor, WVLT-TV, Knoxville, TN.

**Wendy Saltzman** to reporter, WGCL-TV, Atlanta, from WKMG-TV, Orlando, FL.

**Ramona Schindelheim** to executive producer, CNBC, New York.

**Orrin Schoenfeld** to assistant news director, WPTZ/WNNE-TV, Plattsburgh, NY, from Science News, New York.

**Shaun Seow** promoted to CEO, Dy Group, from managing director, MediaCorp Pte. Ltd., Singapore.

**Holly Shepard** to assistant news director, WMTW-TV, Portland, ME, from executive producer, WUSA-TV, Washington.

**Catherine Snyder** to assistant news director, WUSA-TV, Washington.

**Amara Sohn** to reporter, WTVJ-TV, Miami, from KMIR-TV, Palm Springs, CA.

**Peter Speciale** to news director, WCJB-TV, Gainesville, FL.

**Drew Speier** to anchor/reporter, WFIE-TV, Evansville, IN.

**Marc Stewart** to reporter, WSMV-TV, Nashville, TN, from WBIR-TV, Knoxville.

**Holly Whisenhunt Stephen** to executive producer, WTHR-TV, Indianapolis, from producer, WOAI-TV, San Antonio.

**Josh Talkington** to reporter/anchor, WFTS-TV, Tampa, FL from anchor, KVVU-TV, Las Vegas.

**Christine Tanaka** to news director, KIMT-TV, Mason City, IA, from managing editor, XETV, San Diego.

**Lisa Teachman** to meteorolo-

gist, Sinclair's NewsCentral, Baltimore, from WSAZ-TV, Huntington, WV.

**Patricia Torres-Burd** to EVP, Latin America Broadcasting Station Group, Houston, from VP, United Broadcast Consultants, Houston.

**Amy Troy** to anchor/reporter, KGW-TV, Portland, OR, from KNXV-TV, Phoenix.

**Michael Valentine** to news director, WFAA-TV, Dallas, from WVEC-TV, Norfolk, VA.

**Joe Vasquez** promoted to anchor from reporter, KBHK-TV, San Francisco.

**Jennifer Waddell** to anchor, KGUN-TV, Tucson, AZ, from reporter/anchor, WSLS-TV, Roanoke, VA.

**April Warnecke** to anchor, KTVK-TV, Phoenix.

**Melanie Waxler** promoted to anchor/reporter from anchor, WTOW-TV, Terre Haute, IN.

**Leona Wood** to executive producer, KTVK-TV, Phoenix, from news director, KXLY-TV, Spokane, WA.

**Randy Wood** to managing editor, WEAR-TV, Pensacola, FL, from acting news director, WCJB-TV, Gainesville, FL.

**Brian Yocono** to reporter, WAGM-TV, Presque Isle, ME, from promotions director, WMSJ-FM, Freeport, ME.

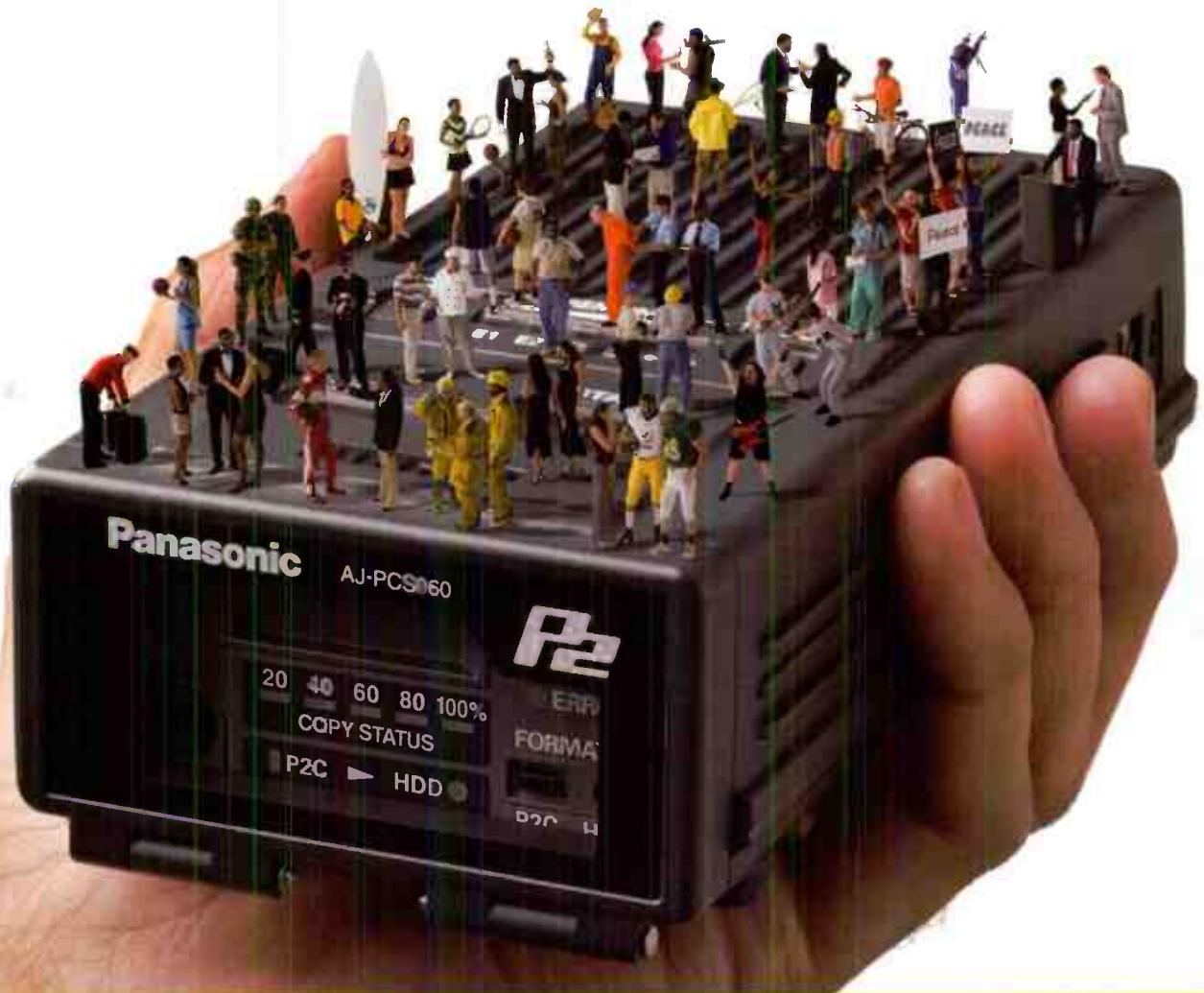
**Ryan Young** to reporter, WSB-TV, Atlanta, from WNCN-TV, Raleigh, NC.

### Deaths

**Steve Ramsey**, GM, WSMV-TV, Nashville, TN, died August 22 at age 52.

**Lynsie Weeks**, reporter, WTMJ-TV, Milwaukee, died July 28 at age 41.



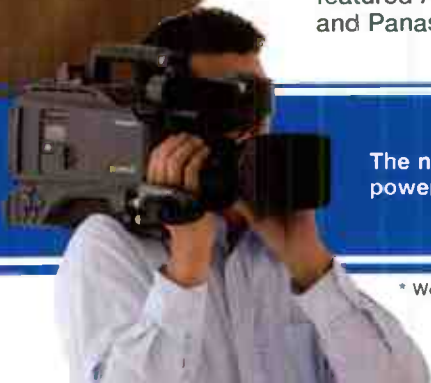


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The new AJ-SPC700 DVCPRO50/25 P2 camcorder offers low power consumption and high cost efficiency for newsgathering.

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\* Weight of AJ-PCS060 is 1.4 pounds

World Radio History



# On Edward R. Murrow and Peter Jennings

Reflecting on what two journalism legends brought to the industry.

I was 5 years old when Edward R. Murrow died, so I never got to meet the electronic journalism legend. But as I reflected on Peter Jennings' passing this summer, I realized that maybe I had met Murrow—or at least his spirit—twice.

The first time was in New Orleans in September 1995, on the night RTNDA gave Peter our highest honor, the Paul White Award. He would later say it meant more to him than many of the other awards he received because it came from his peers.

When former RTNDA chair Marci Burdick introduced me, he asked where I was from.

I explained I had just left my long-time job as a radio news director in Springfield, MO, and that I would be starting a new job as a radio news director in Milwaukee the following Tuesday. His eyes lit up.

"Milwaukee!" he exclaimed. "What a great town!"

For the next few minutes, Peter regaled me with details about Milwaukee that I suspect natives didn't even know. I was impressed by two things that night: Suave, urbane Peter Jennings was a nice guy, and one of the world's most influential journalists had an intimate knowledge of America's 19th largest city. If he knew that much about Milwaukee, I remember thinking, there must not be any corner of the world with which he wasn't familiar.

The second time I met him was in April 1997. The people who ran ABC

News Radio in those days were trying to impress my station's management team so we would become an affiliate. They invited me and our program director to New York. After daylong meetings at the network's headquarters, we were taken up the street to the ABC television studios, where we got to watch a World News Tonight broadcast.

We sat behind and to the right of Peter, just off camera. One of the first things we noticed was a monitor just below the lens of his primary camera. On that monitor was NBC Nightly News, which had recently overtaken World News Tonight in the ratings. Every time he'd go to a package or spot break, Peter would reach under his anchor desk and turn a knob controlling the monitor's volume so he could also hear Tom Brokaw. I asked our ABC escort about it.

"Peter is very concerned about NBC's ratings," he replied.

When the broadcast ended, Peter walked over to us. The ABC News Radio executives introduced us as "VIPs" who were potential affiliates. He smiled and said hello.

I was impressed by something that night: One of the world's most influential journalists was a fiercely competitive person.

Peter was much more than that, of course. In some respects, I believe he may have been the closest thing our industry has had to Edward R. Murrow since, well, Edward R. Murrow.

To be sure, a number of influential network journalists have made their

marks since Murrow's day. Walter Cronkite, Chet Huntley, David Brinkley, John Chancellor, Frank Reynolds, Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather are among them. But the parallels between Murrow and Jennings are striking.

Murrow overcame odds that must have seemed insurmountable—he was born into a home with no running water in a place called Polecat, NC. Jennings overcame odds that must have seemed insurmountable—he never graduated high school.

Murrow established the first significant American network news bureau in Europe, in the late 1930s. Jennings established the first American network news bureau in the Middle East, in the late 1960s.

Murrow's work was thrust into the national consciousness when he filed his "This...is London" reports during the Battle of Britain's German blitzkrieg. Jennings' work was thrust into the national consciousness when he filed reports from Munich's Olympic village during the 1972 hostage crisis in which 11 Israeli athletes and six other people were killed.

Murrow wasn't afraid to take on a demagogic politician in the 1950s: Sen. Joseph McCarthy. Jennings wasn't afraid to take on a demagogic industry in the 1990s: big tobacco.

Murrow's "Harvest of Shame" exposed Americans to the plight of the persecuted migrant farm worker. "Peter Jennings Reporting" exposed Americans to the plight of the persecuted Jesus.

Murrow admonished those attending the 1958 RTNDA convention in Chicago that unless they used television news to teach, illuminate and inspire, the medium would become nothing but "wires and lights in a box." Jennings admonished those attending the 2004 RTNDA awards dinner in New York that unless we resisted any temptation to skew our news products

## Chairman's Column

merely to quiet certain vocal critics on the right, we'd become irrelevant.

"We all have biases," he said. "God knows I do. But I am less inclined to cling to them quite as assiduously when I make an effort to hear other points of view... Whatever people say about the liberal media—whatever that actually means—in 40 years the evening news has never been driven by ideology."

Edward R. Murrow died of lung cancer in upstate New York on April 27, 1965. Peter Jennings died of lung cancer in New York City on August 7, 2005.

I am better off for having met Peter, twice. We are all better off for having had Peter—the nice guy, the man who knew virtually every corner of the world and the fierce competitor—in our profession. And the world is better off for having had him as a citizen.—Dan Shelley is news director and assistant program director at WTMJ-AM in Milwaukee. You can reach him at [dshelley@62owtmj.com](mailto:dshelley@62owtmj.com).

### Covering Hurricane Katrina

In the days after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast on August 29, radio, television and online journalists worked around the clock to serve their devastated communities. They braved fatigue, danger and deplorable conditions to provide critical information. Others converged on the area to chronicle the events for the rest of the world. Some rescued the stranded, helped connect lost loved ones and provided conduits to make pleas for help. RTNDA praises the electronic journalists who covered Katrina and its aftermath. We echo what one grateful Mississippi survivor told a TV reporter on August 31: "I don't know what this world would be like without people like you."

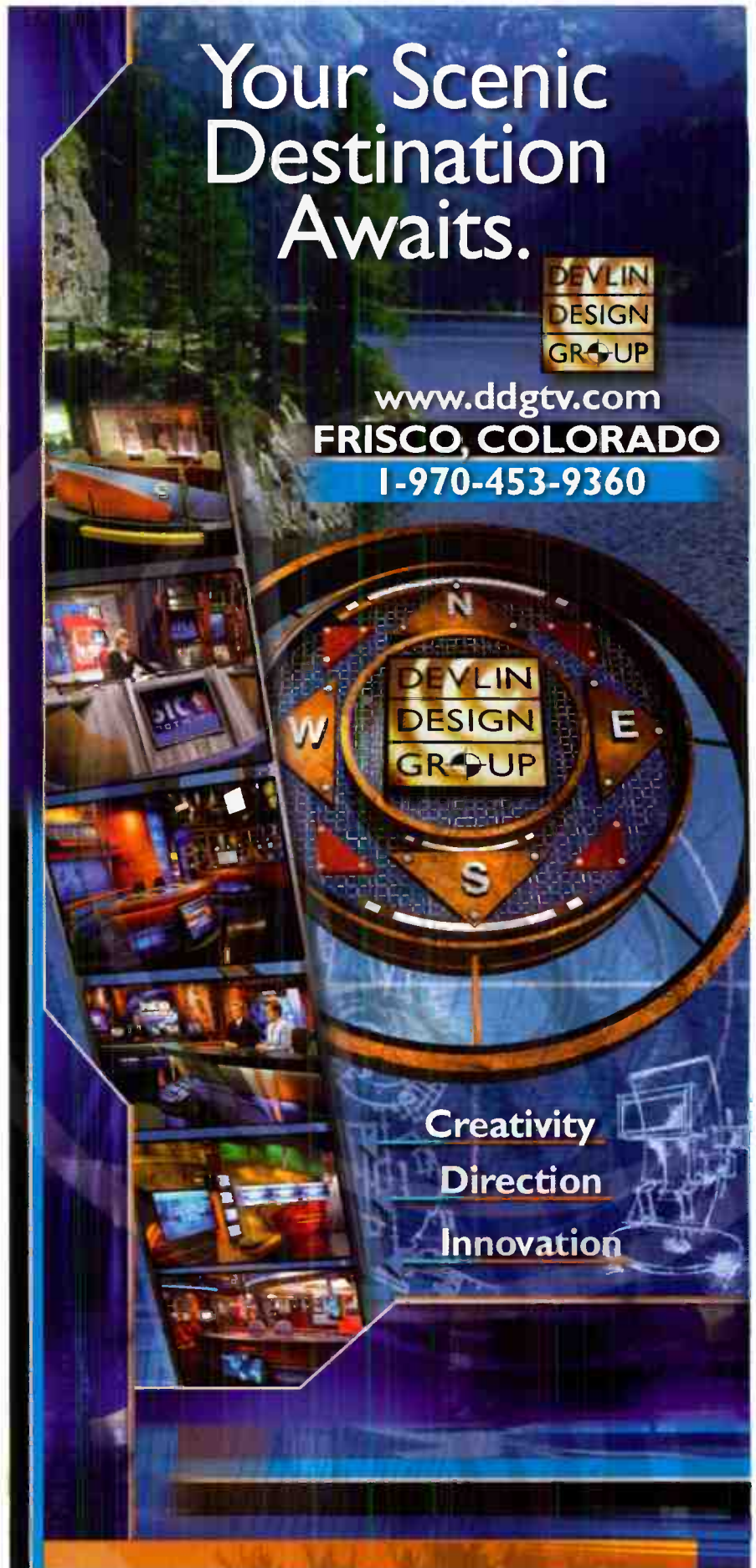
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# Katrina Brings Out Best in Journalists

News media coverage galvanizes the public and government response.

Once again, a catastrophe struck America and once again the stricken communities, the nation and the world depended on electronic journalists to bring them the story. Nearly four years after September 11 underscored the value and purpose of television and radio news, Hurricane Katrina devastated a region but brought out the best in electronic journalism.

Local stations struggled to stay on the air or return as soon as possible. WWL-TV in New Orleans had planned for a Katrina-style disaster by relocating its tower to high, dry ground and arranging to move operations to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. They never went off the air. WDSU-TV moved operations to WAPT-TV in Jackson, MS, and fed their broadcast through WESH-TV in Orlando, FL, to a webcast before they were able to return to air Friday on WPLX-TV in New Orleans. WGNO-TV combined operations with WBRZ-TV in Baton Rouge and also began a webcast. New Orleans' WWL-AM and Clear Channel stations in the region combined operations to form the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans, broadcasting news on 15 stations. In Biloxi, MS, WLOX-TV kept viewers informed through their website after the roof blew off the station.

Stations found ingenious ways to serve their communities, offering non-stop coverage on the web, posting notices for those seeking lost relatives and showing aerial photographs of damage in specific neighborhoods.



AP Radio's Derrill Holly interviews an evacuee from New Orleans inside the Houston Astrodome.

Almost everyone who struggled to keep their news operations going was personally affected by Katrina. Dozens of station employees lost their homes, cars and possessions and had to relocate their families. Some may have lost their lives. More than one week after Katrina struck, nearly every station had staff members who were unaccounted for.

Broadcast and cable networks dispatched dozens of people to the area and then had to cope with providing enough food, water and fuel to keep them going. That coverage galvanized the nation, prodding government to respond with more and more resources. The news media were in closer touch with what was going on and ahead of the government in comprehending the depth of the problems. The video from the New Orleans Superdome and the convention center was undeniable.

And it was the news media that kept asking questions and holding officials accountable. Chris Wallace, host of Fox

News Sunday, asked Homeland Security secretary Michael Chertoff, "Mr. Secretary, how is it possible that you could not have known on late Thursday, for instance, that there were thousands of people in the convention center who didn't have food, who didn't have water, who didn't have security, when that was being reported on national television?"

This is exactly the role the news media are supposed to play on behalf of the public.

One factor that made the coverage unusual was the emotion shown by anchors and reporters on the air. On Sunday night, before the levees had broken, CNN's Jeanne Meserve was in tears when she told anchor Aaron Brown, "We are sometimes wacky thrill seekers. But when you stand in the dark, and you hear people yelling for help and no one can get to them, it's a totally different experience." On

Thursday, NBC photographer Tony Zumbado was interviewed about what he had seen at the convention center. "They are just left behind," he said. "There is nothing offered to them. No water, no ice, no C-rations. Nothing, for the last four days." MSNBC's Joe Scarborough, a former congressman, said, "It is amateur hour, and it has been amateur hour for the past four or five days."

The public often says they find journalists callous or insensitive when they confront victims of disaster. This time there was no mistaking that reporters were outraged and shaken by what they were witnessing. The public appreciated the sincerity of the journalists, and that what the journalists were reporting was based on facts, not opinion or ideology.

We're just in the early stages of assessing the impact of Katrina not only on the Gulf Coast, but also on our business. That impact is bound to be

## President's Column

big. Stations will have to rebuild facilities and find audiences, who have now scattered to evacuation centers throughout the country. The networks are opening bureaus to cover the aftermath, just as they have in Baghdad.

The journalists who suffered material losses will have to cope. Companies have established funds to help their employees. RTNDA encourages anyone who wants to help journalists to consider making a contribution to those funds, or to the Broadcasters Foundation, which assists individual broadcasters with grants. Information is posted on the RTNDA website.

The psychic scars may be more difficult to heal. Journalists witnessed grim things, things they said they never expected to see in America. Reporters found themselves confronting desperate people without the means to provide help. Many behaved heroically, doing what they could to alleviate the suffering they saw.

We've made progress in understanding that journalists can be deeply shaken by what they encounter when they cover disaster. We now realize that the signs of that distress may not appear immediately but may surface long after the crisis has eased. We need to do more to extend a helping hand to individuals in need, and that's something RTNDA will focus on in the months ahead.

There are so many lessons to be learned from Katrina—having a good emergency plan, mobilizing resources within a station group, using the Internet to communicate, planning for employee needs when disaster strikes.

But the most important lesson is this: In a crisis, electronic journalists rise to the occasion magnificently and surmount unbelievable obstacles to serve the public. This is why we salute all those who told the story of Hurricane Katrina from the beginning, and who will keep telling it for months and years to come.—Barbara Cochran, president of RTNDA, can be reached at [president@rtnda.org](mailto:president@rtnda.org).

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# Listen Up

By Deborah Potter

**Stations rely on old standbys and new technology to stay in touch with the audience.**

On a Saturday in June, the KRON-TV studio in San Francisco was packed with more than 100 local bloggers attending a “meet-up,” an event organized by the station as much for its benefit as for theirs.

“These are people who have taken the time to think about something,” says online news manager Brian Shields. By getting to know them, he says, “we think we can connect with things going on in neighborhoods around the Bay Area and get stories others won’t.”

After a similar meeting in Nashville earlier this year, WKRN-TV launched its own blog, [NashvilleIsTalking.com](http://NashvilleIsTalking.com). A station employee posts comments and links to what she reads on other local blogs.

“This is a conduit to a voice we might not normally hear,” says director of news and local programming Steve Sabato. Being plugged in to the blogosphere provides a barometer of what people are interested in, he says, and helps the station find intelligent, articulate people to talk to. “It has made us a smarter, more in touch newsroom.”

I just want to express

Saw an interesting piece

I am disappointed about the

We watch your news programming

You really should

Great job and keep it up!

Thank you for bringing us the

All the added graphics are distracting  
All the pointless busy stuff, for what?

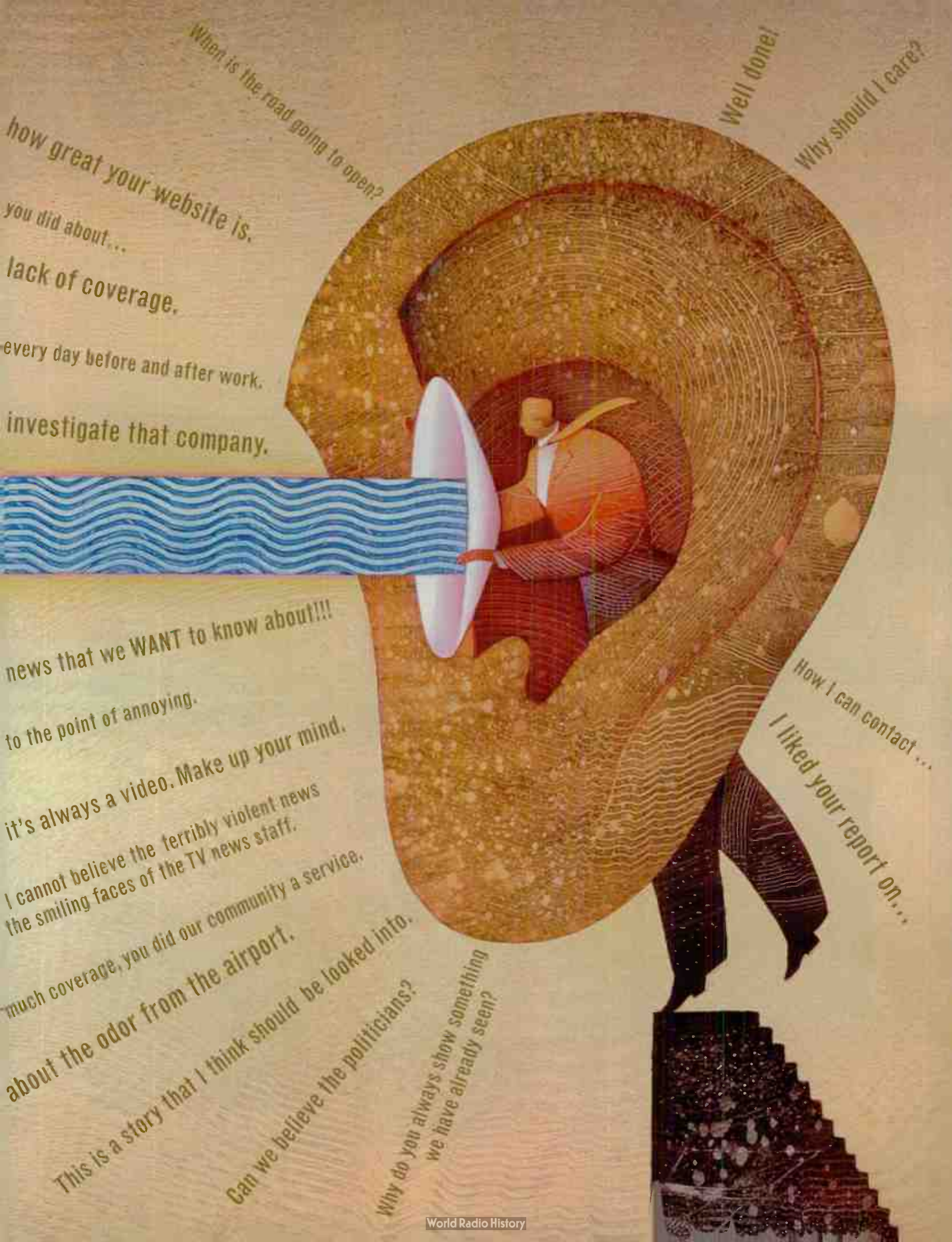
You say it's picture of the day but

My goodness  
that precedes

In a time when “good news” doesn't get

Thanks for the story





When is the road going to open?

Well done!

Why should I care?

how great your website is,  
you did about...

lack of coverage,

every day before and after work,

investigate that company,

news that we WANT to know about!!!

to the point of annoying.

it's always a video. Make up your mind.

I cannot believe the terribly violent news  
the smiling faces of the TV news staff.

much coverage, you did our community a service,  
about the odor from the airport.

This is a story that I think should be looked into.

Can we believe the politicians?

Why do you always show something  
we have already seen?

How I can contact ...

I liked your report on...

The person behind both stations' efforts is consultant and former news director Terry Heaton, who says that embracing new media is one way for television news to begin rebuilding its shrinking audience. "You're reaching people you never would have reached before because most of these people have given up on news and TV news in particular," he says.

What's happening at the two Young Broadcasting stations is a high-tech version of an old-fashioned concept that's now back in vogue—that broad-

cast news organizations should listen to the people they serve.

Years ago, stations were obliged to do just that as a condition for keeping their licenses. But when the industry was deregulated in the 1980s, the FCC stopped requiring what it called "community ascertainment." Since then, consolidation of ownership has led to public complaints that "broadcast stations may be failing to meet the needs of their local communities," as the FCC put it last year in announcing a formal inquiry. And increased competition in

local news has prompted stations to look for ways to distinguish their newscasts from all the others. News managers think they can address both concerns by listening to their communities in new ways and old.

In Syracuse, NY, WSYR-TV started listening to its audience a few years ago almost out of desperation. During a slow news week in February 2000, then assistant news director Jim Tortora made a suggestion—what if the newsroom set up a phone line and asked viewers to call in with story

## Ways To Listen To Your Audience

### Host Meet-Ups With Area Bloggers



Above: More than 100 area bloggers attended the KRON meet-up in June. Right: WKRN found inspiration after meeting with Nashville bloggers.

### Staff Phone Lines



Above: As a Your Stories investigator, Jennifer Lewke gets ideas from talking to viewers.

Right: WISC editorial director Neil Heinen (at head of table) leads a breakfast meeting with community leaders from area universities, private companies and public office.

### Meet With Community Leaders



Left to right: WXMI news director Tim Dye talks with anchor Christian Frank, Ottawa County sheriff Gary Rosema and Ottawa County lieutenant Steve Kempker during an August news outreach meeting.



### Hold Town Meetings



WGAL reporter Janelle Stelson takes a question from Dorothy Brockett of Gettysburg in a May 19 town meeting.

### Build a Listener Network



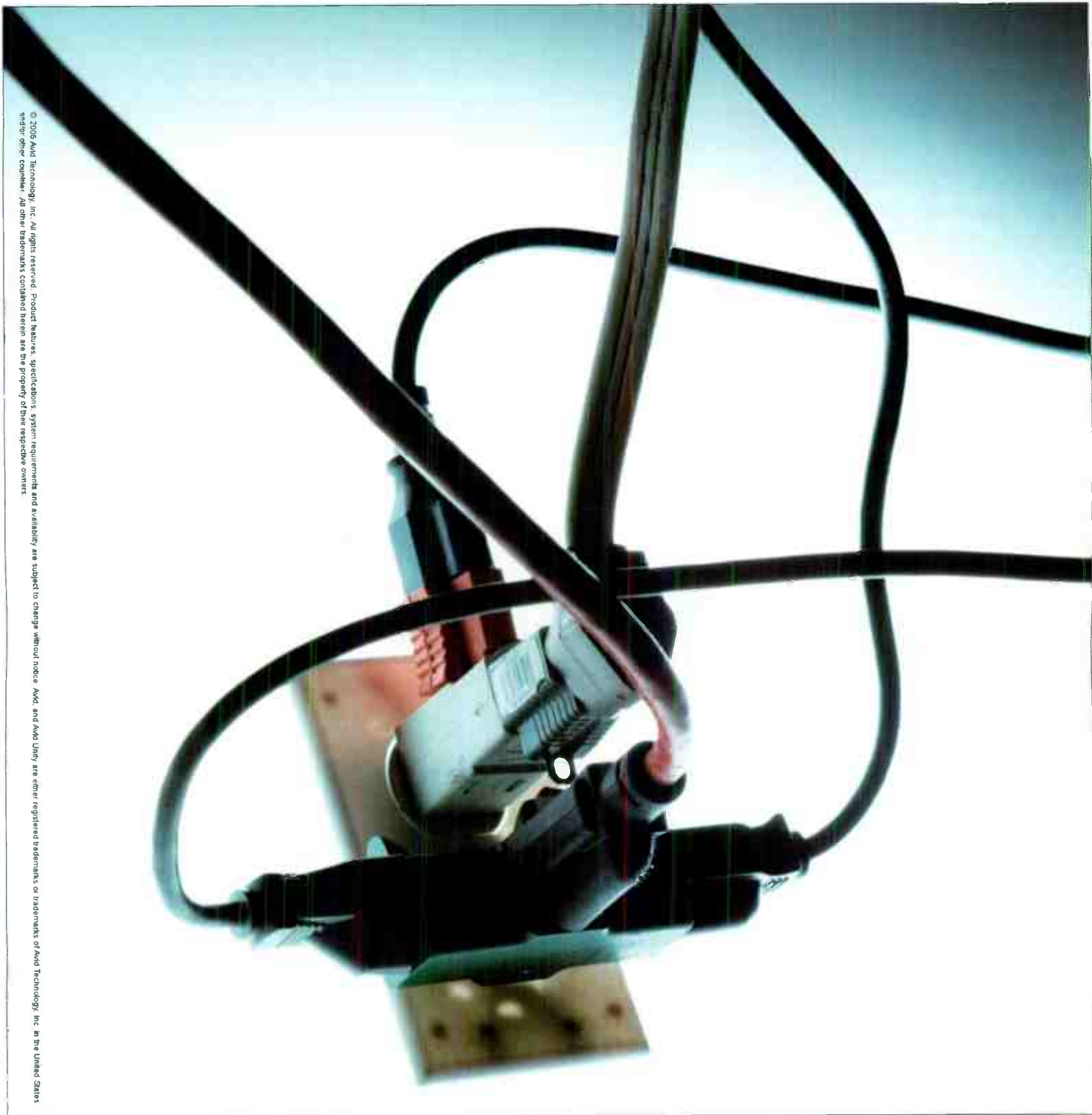
MPR's Public Insight Journalism solicits viewer feedback on the air and on its website.

### Go on the Road



WTKR's Your3 On Tour takes meteorologist Dave Parker to the people.

John Armstrong/Getty Images Times



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ideas? After everyone stopped giggling, he says, they decided to try it. A few calls came in, a few decent stories developed, and news managers noticed that every time one of these viewer-suggested stories aired, the station got more calls offering new ideas. Eventually, the station began promoting and showcasing the reports, calling them "Your Stories." But the idea didn't really take off until the newsroom held a call-in night with reporters manning the phones and received 650 calls in two hours.

Five years later, the franchise is still going strong, with viewer-generated stories airing in almost every newscast. What makes "Your Stories" different from an ordinary tip line is that callers always talk to a person, not a machine, and they always get an answer, even if it's just a referral to a source of additional information.

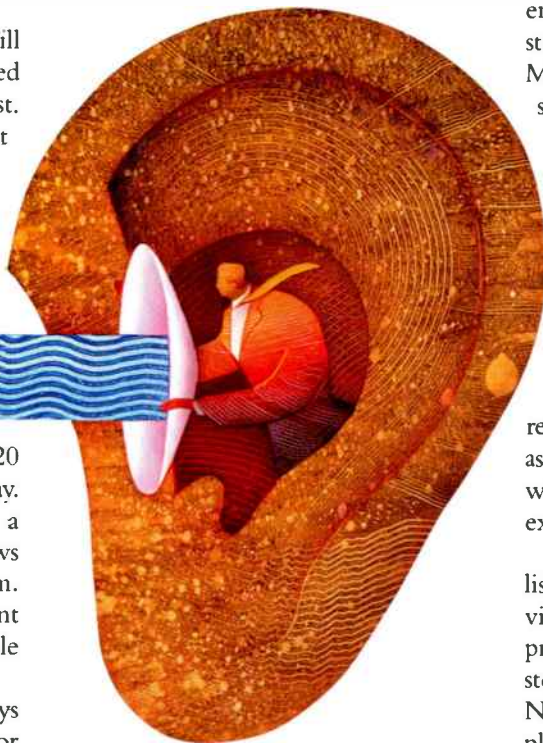
The station also gets more than 20 story suggestions by email every day. To wade through it all, WSYR has a full-time off-air coordinator. The news director, assignment editor and 5 p.m. anchor, who is also the main segment reporter, all keep tabs on possible stories.

The stories that make air are always memorable. Tortora, now news director at WIXT-TV in Syracuse, recalls a woman who called WSYR about an odd \$4.53 charge on her phone bill that led to a station investigation, multiple lawsuits against AT&T and settlements in eight states. And there was the couple who couldn't get electric service at their new home because the telephone and power companies were fighting over who was responsible for the closest pole.

Other stations have adopted the "Your Stories" tactic, from KFMB-TV in San Diego to WTKR-TV in Norfolk, VA, which recently renamed its franchise "Power of 3" and focuses more on consumer and investigative reporting. "I believe in the concept because viewers have so many choices," says news director Jeff Parsons. "If

we deliver what they ask for, then they'll watch us."

In addition to soliciting audience feedback and participation online with regular web chats about local news stories, Parsons has resurrected some traditional approaches to improving community connections, including holding open houses at the station's three newsrooms and taking its newscasts on the road. "I want people to know we are part of the community," he says, "not just those people they see on TV."



At WXMI-TV in Grand Rapids, MI, news director Tim Dye has launched what he calls a news outreach program with a similar goal of "letting folks in the community know more about us." Once a week, on average, he invites a local community leader or someone from law enforcement, politics, business or education to visit the station for a couple of hours. They meet with news managers and sit in on the afternoon editorial meeting.

"They're encouraged to offer story ideas in their area of expertise and give us feedback on how we can do our jobs more effectively," Dye says. He knows some might question whether the program compromises journalistic integrity, but he doesn't see a conflict. "I'm not selling the news or giving away the

farm. I'm making contact with people we talk to on a regular basis and trying to do a better job."

Minnesota Public Radio makes contact with its listeners through a project it calls Public Insight Journalism. Over the past couple of years, MPR has built a database of 10,000 names of people who are willing to be contacted about news stories, and who have volunteered information about their interests and expertise. "We believe that someone in our audience knows more about any particular story than we do," says Bill Buzenberg, MPR's vice president for news, and he says the database helps reporters find great sources quickly.

The station solicits listener input on the air and online. Every piece on the MPR website includes a "help us cover this story" link so the audience can add thoughts and insights. Special reports, like an examination of the state's economy, often start with an audience survey resulting in what Buzenberg describes as "much more sophisticated reporting, with more depth, and lots of real-world examples and voices."

In Lancaster, PA, WGAL-TV started listening almost 10 years ago after viewers hammered the station for not providing more coverage of a snowstorm that hit while it was airing an NFL playoff game. When the complaints were still coming in a month later, general manager Paul Quinn called a town meeting that drew a huge crowd.

"Many people came with their fists all balled up," Quinn says. "We defused a lot of the anger and I felt so good about it we decided to go to other cities in our coverage area."

Now the station holds town meetings on the road eight times a year, in partnership with a local newspaper, radio station and chamber of commerce. There's no program. News director Dan O'Donnell, assignment editors and producers show up and listen. What they hear often becomes news, "almost always things I would not have known about otherwise," O'Donnell says. The stories range from a quick turn about a local traffic prob-

lem to an investigation into a loophole in state law that led to new legislation.

Quinn says the meetings cost almost nothing. The venue is donated; the station shells out for chips, pretzels and soda. The meetings do take time and effort to organize, but Quinn says it's worth it. "It sort of defines us now," he says. "It helps us cement our relationship with viewers. It lets them know we are approachable and trying to do better."

One of the longest standing community listening efforts has been under way at WISC-TV in Madison, WI, since 1988. Small groups of citizens meet with station representatives four times a year. The invitation list changes every quarter and there's no agenda, just a general discussion about their lives and concerns. A separate children's task force of students and adults meets twice a year to discuss issues facing kids in the community.

"It's so simple yet so beneficial to just sit there and listen to people talk," says station manager Tom Bier, who spearheads the community breakfasts. "You really get an idea of the issues that matter." As a result of the conversations, he says, the station has been able to identify and report on trends "at the bubble-up stage," much earlier than they would have otherwise, like the emergence of a new drug problem in town or the impact of the growing Hispanic community on social services.

The station also listens to viewers on the air at least once a month in a segment during the 5 p.m. newscast called "Talkback Thursday." For five or six minutes, a station employee—from the news director to the chief engineer—fields questions and answers them live. "We also answer emails and return phone calls," Bier says. "People are just stunned when you respond to them."

Bier admits that all of this outreach takes time and effort, but he believes not doing it would be a greater risk to the station's long-term future. "The risk is you don't understand the market, you're doing things everybody else is doing and the viewers won't care," he says. "Then they'll definitely leave us."—Deborah Potter, executive director of NewsLab in Washington, is former executive director of RTNDF.

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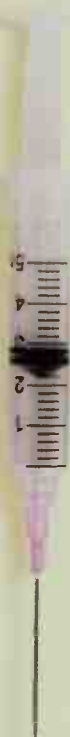
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# **Rx** for GOOD JOURNALISM & GOOD RATINGS:

A Strong Dose of Health Care Reporting

By Michelle Levander  
and Jackie Judd



**W**hen Keith Connors took over as news director of WCNC-TV in Charlotte, NC, in 1998, he inherited the weakest station in the market with the smallest news team in town. It might have been tempting to turn to a tried-and-true formula to spike ratings: splashier crime stories, car wrecks, a rough-and-tumble drug bust or two. Instead, Connors decided to go with his gut and pursue tough, high-impact stories.

His top story for 2004 revolved around health policy. Sound dull? The station ultimately devoted hundreds of reporting hours to an exposé of how Medicaid dental clinics for the poor profited by filling children's mouths with crowns unnecessarily. Dentists separated children from their parents for hours, strapped them down in strait-jacket-like "papoose boards," and drilled as many as 17 teeth in one procedure. Clinic employees received special bonuses of \$1,500 for placing the most crowns into children's mouths.

The compelling stories won top journalism honors and catapulted the station to the top position in the market. For Connors, the station's success also confirmed his instinct to put health news on the front burner.

"It grew ratings and revenue faster than any other station in the market,"

says Connors, now executive news director of KHOU-TV in Houston.

What sells in local news? Health news would rarely be on the top of most news directors' lists. That helps explain why health news has so long been buried deep in local newscasts—and why, even then, coverage is sometimes dominated by stories on the latest diet craze or a new plastic surgery fix. "It goes to the bias that a lot of news directors have against health reporting," says Connors. "They see it as 'chick' news: soft, fluffy, feature stuff."

It's easy to understand why some news editors and reporters are hesitant to take on knottier health topics. The words "health policy" alone can send some viewers scrambling for the remote control. Then, there are the limits of the newscast to contend with: How do you convey a complex, multi-layered story in two minutes or less?

Still, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that serious, hard-hitting health stories should be part of any news station's strategy for wooing viewers and improving ratings.

Consider the political equivalent of ratings—the polls. Health care consistently plays an important role in national elections. This pocketbook issue ranked right behind the war in Iraq and the economy among voters in the 2004 presidential election. And

when pollsters surveyed the country's fast-growing immigrant communities, they found that medical care ranks as their top concern, while the general population ranks it just below education and unemployment.

In many towns and cities, hospitals and health care facilities serve as the biggest employers. Health care is also essential to the financial stability of families. Record growth in health care costs has provoked a national affordability crisis. Today, unpaid medical bills account for about half of all personal bankruptcies in America.

Viewers already have an appetite for stories on health and health care. The trick is all in the telling. At RTNDA@NAB, we asked several news leaders to share their philosophies on covering health. Here are some of their stories:

#### **The News Executive: Paula Madison**

If you want to produce stories about the health of your community, ask different questions, says Paula Madison, president and general manager of KNBC-TV in Los Angeles. Madison turned the typical "beat" check on its head in her former post as news director of WNBC-TV in New York City when she told the reporters to add hospitals, school districts and county government offices to their daily call list. "What is the beat check? Calling the cops. Well, if you



want stories about crime to fill up your newscast, then, that's great. But why not say, 'Well, what if we are going to do stories about [other] issues? What are you all seeing trend-wise that you could tell us about?'"

These days, Madison senses an interest among the public for information on how to live with the chronic conditions that are now the leading causes of death and disability in the United States, namely heart disease, cancer and diabetes. It's also a topic that hits home for Madison,



Paula Madison

who was diagnosed two years ago with diabetes.

Ever the journalist, Madison researched how to live with being a diabetic. Today, she is a marathon runner and more physically fit than ever before. As a news executive, she avoids imposing her personal experiences on coverage in the newscast. Still, she recognizes in her own questions about diabetes the desire of many viewers for more information on health choices.

### The Award Winner: Keith Connors

News director Keith Connors knows his morning news meeting is on track if his producers ask, "Who's bringing in the Vioxx recall?" with the same urgency as the question about who will cover last night's drive-by.

Connors defines a successful newsroom as one that fully integrates health coverage into the news mix.

"You've got to throw out this notion of the 'health report.' It needs to be part of your daily news diet. Health news is hard news."

With that attitude as a starting point, Connors was quick to recognize the possibilities when one of his



Keith Connors



WSMU's TennCare story "touched every single one of our viewers," says news director Andrew Finlayson.

staffers returned from a local diner to share a tip from his waitress. The waitress' grandson, a patient at a Medicaid dental clinic for low-income children, had healthy teeth pulled and replaced with crowns. What began as "one little story" blossomed into an 18-month long investigation that won Edward R. Murrow, Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University and George Foster Peabody awards.

At the time, WCNC had the smallest newsroom staff in Charlotte, but Connors decided to use his limited resources differently from his competitors. Why did this choice pay off so handsomely for his station in terms of ratings, revenue and prizes? Says Connors: "Because [health] is relevant content. This is an audience-driver and this is all about bringing people into the house."

The horrors of Medicaid dental clinics were brought to light in WCNC's exposé.



Connors continues to share his "evangelical fever" about health news as he moves up the management ladder at Dallas-based Belo. Shortly after moving to Houston where he is now at KHOU, he stopped by a major hospital to "reconfirm our commitment, to say we want to know about stories." Connors says, to his knowledge, no other news director had come knocking on the hospital's door.



Andrew Finlayson

### The Pragmatist: Andrew Finlayson

Andrew Finlayson, news director at WSMV-TV in Nashville, TN, views health reporting as a twofer: It helps grow ratings and allows journalists to fulfill their civic responsibility to inform the public. Finlayson's philosophy took shape in the 1980s when he was a reporter in San Francisco, covering a then-undiagnosed virus sweeping through the city's gay community.

At WSMV, Finlayson has the only health care reporter in the Nashville television market. He put that reporter and many others at his station to work when Tennessee's governor announced a dramatic cut in TennCare, the state's Medicaid-financed health care program for the poor.

He describes TennCare as "a story that touched every single one of our viewers." The health care industry is Nashville's largest employer and more than 300,000 people were about to lose coverage. Finlayson is convinced that a recent spike in the ratings can be traced to the station's commitment to covering TennCare and other hard news health topics. He credits that coverage for helping his station win the July sweeps for the late night news slot for the first time in seven years.

Finlayson does not cover



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## Health Stories for Any Market

WSMV news director Andrew Finlayson has a keen eye for health stories that have a powerful impact on a community and on ratings. Here are his tried-and-true health story ideas for any news market and the way he has tackled them.

### The bad news counselor

**Story:** There is an individual in almost every community who has the job of telling people they have tested HIV positive. A profile of this counselor provided a fresh spin on the AIDS story.

**Visual:** The reporter did not record the moment of disclosure, but did shoot the counselor before and after, providing a powerful personal perspective.

### Who takes care of mom and dad

**Story:** An investigation about the growing number of complaints about staffing levels and quality of care at nursing homes revealed a larger story about a shortage of caretakers.

**Visual:** The reporter reviewed lawsuits and obtained video and pictures of patients who claim they were mistreated by unqualified caretakers.

### A different kind of drug abuse

**Story:** Government programs provide life-saving drugs to many people, but a small number of recipients scam the system by selling or trading powerful painkilling drugs.

**Visual:** The reporter was there for the arrests of people accused of dealing in misappropriated drugs.

### Fire bells and alcoholics

**Story:** The busiest firehouse in one community responded to repeated emergency calls to treat alcoholics passed out on the streets. This used precious public emergency resources. Would treatment be more economical?

**Visual:** The reporter rode along with the firetrucks to document the time and money spent.

### War on terrorism

**Story:** Local authorities have been dipping into a massive pot of money designated for anti-terrorist measures. A close examination of this spending uncovered the purchase of items of questionable value.

**Visual:** The reporter put on a biohazard suit bought by a rural county that seemed an unlikely terrorist target.

### Killer French fries?

**Story:** America loves French fries despite concerns over trans-fatty acids. The story explored the risks to consumers and alternatives restaurants can use.

**Visual:** The reporter dumped a large bag of fries on a table to illustrate the average American's yearly consumption.

### Don't kill the rhino

**Story:** A visit to stores in immigrant communities found a range of products being sold that claimed to contain banned animal parts which some cultures believe restore health.

**Visual:** The reporter made undercover visits to stores that sold some of the products.

TennCare—or stories like it—every day. He is candid about the need to go with lighter fare as well. “It’s time for true confessions,” he told the RTNDA panel in Las Vegas. “We do two kinds of medical reporting. We do the fun stuff that everybody wants to watch and is eminently teasable. Then there are the other, more serious stories that can likewise improve ratings and touch the community.”

Finlayson says the trick to covering serious stories is clever promotions. WSMV garnered attention for a story on a black market for prescription drugs by asking viewers: Do you want to hear about how drugs paid for with taxpayer dollars are being stolen? “The answer,” says Finlayson, “is ‘hell yes!’ But if the question is: ‘Would you like to know about public health policy as it affects the poor?’ The answer is ‘hell no!’”

### The Caregiver: Robert Ross

Robert Ross, MD, is keenly aware of the media’s power to shape public awareness. A pediatrician who has dedicated his career to community health, Ross heads The California Endowment, one of the country’s largest health philanthropies.

As a public health advocate, he is dismayed by how quickly the broadcast media seize on the quick fix and the hunt for a cure—rather than prevention.

“Eighty percent of what influences health status,” he says, “has nothing to do with health care that you get within the four walls of a medical institution.” Instead, lifestyle decisions—about smoking, drinking, wearing a seatbelt or exercising—have a far greater role in shaping an individual’s health.



He encourages reporters to explore the health of their communities, raising questions about the quality of life and longevity rather than focusing on the pills and procedures offered up by the health care industry.

“Try to shine a light on communities, on prevention, on lifestyle,” he urges, “and on the things that a local viewer can do in the context of his family or his community.”—Michelle Levander, director of The California Endowment Health Journalism Fellowships at USC’s Annenberg School for Communication, has worked as a reporter and editor for *Time Magazine Asia*, *The Asian Wall Street Journal* and the *San Jose Mercury News*. Jackie Judd, a vice president with the Kaiser Family Foundation, has reported for ABC News, National Public Radio and CBS News.

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# News, Staffing and Profitability Survey

Latest research shows overall growth with caution in planning.

By Bob Papper

Overall, the past year was a strong one for the amount of both news and staff, but there are some cautionary signs in the latest RTNDA/Ball State University Annual Survey.

The total amount of local TV news time per week remains at record levels. Staffing grew slightly again, although it's still below the peak of 2000.

Generally, the biggest television stations got bigger, but the picture was mixed for many others.

Even as staffing rose to its second highest level ever, fewer TV news directors expect to see more news or more staff in the coming year. There was also a big drop in news profitability, although only a small decrease in the percentage of revenue that news brings in to the typical station.

The total number of TV stations originating local news rose by four to 778. Despite the attention given to stations that have dropped local news, there has actually been a net increase every year we've tracked the number. Another 81 stations get local news from one of the 778, up 13 from a year ago.

Consolidation in radio and the accompanying changes in the survey to accommodate that consolidation make it difficult to track changes in radio over time. After a drop last year, staffing and news numbers returned to nearly the levels of two years ago. Part of the problem in attempting to compare the data is that, every year, radio news directors oversee the news on more and more stations. This year, the typical radio news director oversaw four stations—that's up a full station from a year ago.

## Staff Size Changes

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the Same	Don't Know
<b>Television</b>				
All Television	29.2%	18.8%	41.3%	10.7%
Big 4 Affiliates	33.2	18.5	41.2	7.1
Other Commercial	8.6	25.7	28.6	37.1
<b>Radio</b>				
All Radio	22.9%	65.6%	11.5%	0

**Television:** Overall, two-thirds of TV news staffs increased in number or remained the same. News departments at ABC stations were most likely to hold even, and non-network affiliates commonly downsized. **Radio:** Noncommercial news operations are more than twice as likely to have added staff as commercial stations.

## Planned Staff Changes

	Will Increase	Will Decrease	Will Remain the Same	Don't Know
<b>Television</b>				
All Television	22.3%	10.3%	48.0%	19.4%
Big 4 Affiliates	23.5	8.9	53.5	14.1
Other Commercial	5.7	22.9	17.1	54.3
<b>Radio</b>				
All Radio	10.3	76.3	1.0	12.4

**Television:** Almost half of the stations expect to hold staff size steady next year. The bigger the market, the more likely it is to expect planned growth. **Radio:** Noncommercial news operations are much more likely to plan future staff increases. The biggest markets are also more likely to plan staff growth.

## Newsroom Staff Size

	Average full-time	Median full-time	Maximum full-time	Average part-time	Median part-time	Maximum part-time	Average total staff	Median total	Maximum total staff
<b>Television</b>									
<b>All TV</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>39.8</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>175</b>
Big 4 Affiliates	37.3	31.0	155	5.0	3.0	105	42.4	36.0	175
Other Commercial	34.3	28.5	100	4.6	3.5	22	38.9	33.5	100
<b>Market size:</b>									
1-25	56.6	56.0	155	8.7	7.0	34	65.3	64.0	175
26-50	51.2	51.5	120	5.4	4.0	21	56.6	59.0	125
51-100	36.6	36.0	100	4.2	3.0	21	40.8	42.0	100
101-150	24.0	26.0	43	4.6	1.5	105	28.7	28.5	120
151+	17.7	20.0	48	2.8	2.0	12	20.5	21.5	58
<b>Radio</b>									
<b>All radio</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Market size:</b>									
Major	7.4	7.0	14	3.3	1.5	11	10.7	8.5	25
Large	3.9	4.0	11	1.8	1.0	6	5.7	5.0	13
Medium	2.1	2.0	7	1.8	1.0	21	3.9	3.0	22
Small	1.7	1.5	3	0.7	0.0	3	2.4	1.5	6

**Television:** The median staff size in TV news stayed the same as a year ago, but the average rose by 3.1 percent. That's the second-highest staffing level ever. Employment growth was inconsistent across markets, going up slightly in markets 1-25, 101-150 and 150+ but dropping a fraction in markets 26-50 and 51-100. The use of part-timers held steady. Historically, Fox-affiliated newsrooms have been smaller than other network affiliates, but the difference is now insignificant. Newsrooms in the Northeast tend to be bigger, and newsrooms in the West tend to be smaller. **Radio:** Last year, we said that radio news staff size had fallen sharply, but that a change in how we gathered the data because of consolidation could have caused the appearance of a drop. This year, the numbers are back nearly to the levels of two years ago. On the other hand, those people handle news on more stations, so comparisons are difficult.



## News Director Age

While the age of TV news directors this year ranged from 24 to 70, the average and median came in at 44. In 1998, the average and median were 41. Market size, staff size, network affiliation and geography don't alter the number more than two to three years one way or the other.

Typically, news directors have held that position at that station for about three years, although the average is 4.52—brought up by some long-term news directors. Longevity also doesn't vary much by staff size, network affiliation or region, but news directors in the very largest markets have been news director a shorter time than those in other market sizes.

## Number of Stations Radio News Directors Oversee

One	26.8%
Two-Three	18.6
Four	16.5
Five-Six	19.6
Seven-Eight	18.6
Average	3.75
Median	4.0
Maximum	8

Radio news directors aren't much different, with the average and median age at 42. Again, market size, staff size and region make little difference. The news directors at independent, rather than group-owned stations tend to be slightly younger at 38 years old.

## What Else Do Radio News Directors Do?

Announcing (including sports and weather)	27.7%
Public Affairs	23.1
Production	13.8
Talk show host	13.8
Operations	13.8
Program Director	7.7
General Manager	6.2
Other	24.6

Two-thirds of radio news directors report that they also have other responsibilities at the station. That's actually down from nearly three-quarters last year.

## News Profitability

	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
<b>Television</b>									
Showing profit	44.5%	58.4%	55.3%	54.9%	56%	58%	57%	63%	62%
Breaking even	24.2	10.4	13.6	11.6	13	11	9	11	6
Showing loss	12.1	9.2	9.2	11.2	10	11	11	10	8
Don't know	19.2	22.0	21.9	22.3	21	20	23	16	24
<b>Radio</b>									
Showing profit	19.6	22.5	25.2	15.2	17	25	19	22	23
Breaking even	14.4	17.1	13.8	13.9	17	15	18	14	20
Showing loss	3.1	7.2	2.4	7.3	0	7	6	6	6
Don't know	62.9	53.2	58.6	63.6	66	53	57	58	51

**Television:** The biggest change in 2005 is the movement from showing profit to breaking even, and it is a major shift from past surveys. We cannot compare these numbers before 1997 because the wording of the question changed. **Radio:** Most radio news directors don't monitor radio news profitability.

## Percentage of TV Revenue Produced by News

	Average	Median	Minimum	Maximum
<b>All Television</b>	42.8%	45.0%	12.0%	75.0%
<b>Market size:</b>				
1-25	37.9	40.0	12.0	60.0
26-50	40.7	40.0	20.0	75.0
51-100	42.8	45.0	19.0	63.0
101-150	47.1	50.0	26.0	65.0
151+	43.3	50.0	12.0	60.0

The percentage of station revenue from news dropped to 42.8 percent from last year's 46.1 percent. But last year's figure was way up from the year before at 39.7 percent, and this year's number is higher than it has been for five of the last eight years that we've asked this question.

## About the Survey

The RTNDA/Ball State University Survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2004 among all 1,624 operating, non-satellite television stations and a random sample of 1,509 radio stations. Valid responses came from 1,223 television stations (75.3 percent) and 103 radio news directors and general managers representing 417 radio stations. Data for the number of stations originating local news and getting it from others are based on a complete census and are not projected from a smaller sample.

Bob Papper is professor of telecommunications at Ball State University. Data entry and tabulation were done by the Bureau of Business Research at Ball State. This research was supported by the Department of Telecommunications at Ball State University and the Radio-Television News Directors Association.

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## TV News Budgets

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the Same	Don't Know
<b>All Television</b>	44.2%	19.2%	26.0%	10.6%
Big 4 Affiliates	49.3	16.4	27.5	6.8
Other Commercial	11.4	37.1	17.1	34.3
<b>Market size:</b>				
1-25	50.0	13.9	27.8	8.3
26-50	59.6	14.9	14.9	10.6
51-100	45.9	21.6	25.7	6.8
101-150	37.7	18.0	27.9	16.4
151+	29.8	25.5	34.0	10.6

Television news budgets were most likely to go up, but fewer of them rose in the past year (13.7 percent) and more were likely to decrease (39.1 percent) than a year ago. Again, non-network affiliates led the retreat. Budgets in the smallest markets were least likely to go up, while budgets for the largest newsrooms were most likely to increase. ABC affiliates were far less likely to increase than others, but there was no budget pattern by region.

## Amount of News

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the Same	Don't Know
<b>Television</b>				
All Television	29.7%	10.6%	59.0%	0.7
Big 4 Affiliates	32.4	9.4	57.7	0.5
Other Commercial	2.9	22.9	71.4	2.9
<b>Market size:</b>				
1-25	36.1	2.8	61.1	0
26-50	31.3	16.7	52.1	0
51-100	31.2	9.1	59.7	0
101-150	25.8	16.1	58.1	0
151+	26.0	6.0	64.0	4.0
<b>Radio</b>				
All Radio	40.2	50.5	7.2	2.1

**Television:** Almost 60 percent of TV news directors reported keeping the amount of news steady last year. **Radio:** There were no significant differences based on commercial/noncommercial, staff size, market size or region. Group-owned stations were less likely to have increased the amount of news last year and more likely to have cut it back.

For additional information from this survey, see this month's issue of Communicator at [www.rtnda.org](http://www.rtnda.org).

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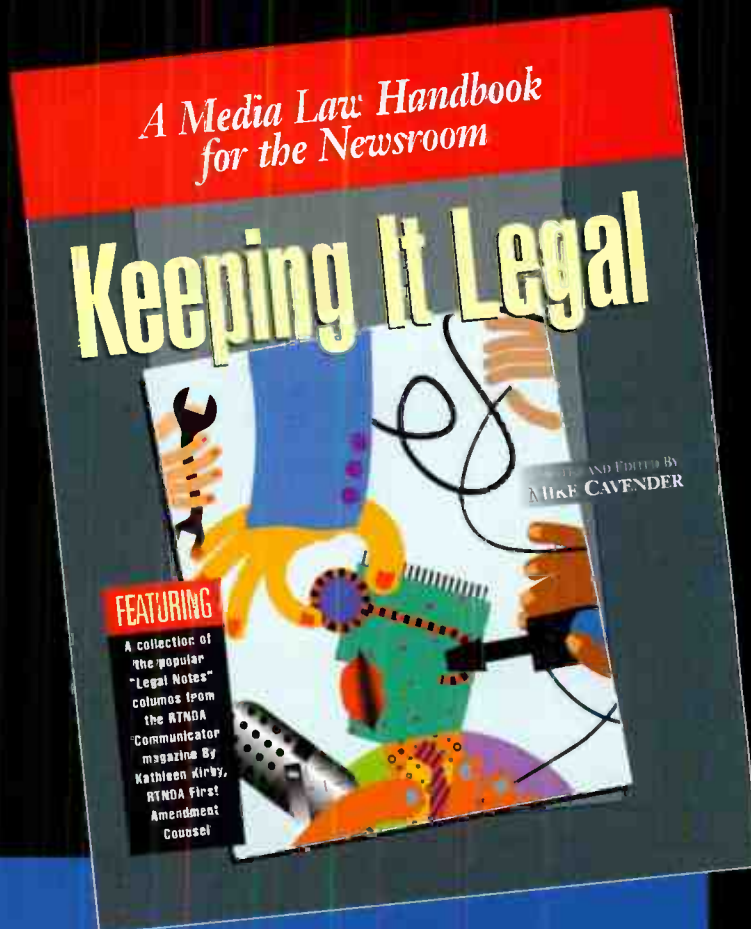
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# Breaking News for Electronic Journalists



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# Officials Ban Reporters, News Outlets

Government officials ban news organizations for unfavorable coverage. Is it legal?

“The right of an American citizen to criticize public officials and policies and to advocate peacefully ideas for change is the central meaning of the First Amendment,” according to the United States Supreme Court. However, government officials increasingly are attempting to prohibit employees from speaking to certain reporters or to ban specific media outlets from attending events because of dissatisfaction with their coverage. A couple of pending lawsuits raise the question of whether such “news boycotts” are constitutional.

Last year, Maryland governor Robert Ehrlich issued a directive banning more than 200 state employees from speaking with two writers for the *Baltimore Sun*. According to reports, the email read, “No one in the Executive Department or Agencies is to speak with [Sun State House bureau chief] David Nitkin or [Sun columnist] Michael Olesker until further notice. Do not return calls or comply with any requests. The Governor’s Press Office feels that currently both are failing to objectively report on any issue dealing with the Ehrlich-Steele administration. Please relay this information to your respective department heads.” Ehrlich and his staff claimed that Olesker and Nitkin were guilty of misstatements and distortions.

The *Sun* filed a lawsuit in federal district court, arguing that the ban violated the First Amendment rights of the two journalists by denying them the same opportunities to seek information as other news organizations

and citizens. The judge dismissed the case, ruling that the *Sun* was seeking special access beyond what is granted to the general public, and that the governor was within the law to deny that special access to the writers because he did not like what they wrote about him.

“The right to publish news is expansive,” the judge wrote. “However, the right does not carry with it the unrestrained right to gather information. The *Sun* seeks the declaration of a constitutional right that neither the Supreme Court nor the 4th Circuit has recognized.” The judge noted that the Ehrlich administration continued to communicate with others at the paper.

The *Sun* has appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit.

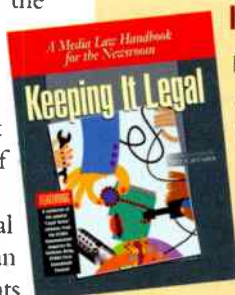
In Youngstown, OH, mayor George McKelvey directed all city employees and members of his administration not to speak with *The Business Journal*, a bi-weekly publication. *The Business Journal* had published articles criticizing

McKelvey and his administration for actions associated with planning and constructing a convocation center.

“As a high-level executive with a broad range of discretionary authority I have made the determination that City administrators and employees may not comment to *The Business Journal* on behalf of the City,” the mayor said in a letter posted on the *Journal*’s website. “In doing so I do not believe that I have overstepped any constitutional or statutory boundaries in exercising my right not to speak with *The Business Journal*. *The Business Journal* should recognize that government officials do not have an obligation to speak with members of the press, and that they cannot be forced to speak with members of the media they believe are untrustworthy. They should also know the ability of the government to control the content of its own speech in ways that it could never regulate or control the content of private speech has been recognized as legitimate.”

The *Journal* sued, alleging that McKelvey unlawfully retaliated against *The Business Journal* for exercising its First Amendment rights and seeking to enjoin the mayor and the city from enforcing their boycott. The city subsequently filed a motion to dismiss, alleging *The Business Journal*’s complaint failed to state a claim upon which relief could be granted, and arguing that *The Business Journal* sought the creation of an unrecognized constitutional right to compel speech on the part of public officials.

As in the case of the *Sun*, the federal district court dismissed the case. The court was not persuaded by the *Journal*’s argument that it was engaged in the constitutionally protected activity of publishing news reports questioning the actions of local government officials. Instead, the court noted that there is no constitutional right of access to information that is not otherwise available to the public. The court also



### Keeping It Legal

For more on legal issues affecting journalists, order a copy of “Keeping It Legal: A Media Law Handbook for the Newsroom” by Kathleen Kirby. To order, call Nicole Newsome at 800.80.RTND or go to [www.rtnda.org/bookstore/orderkil.asp](http://www.rtnda.org/bookstore/orderkil.asp).

stated that granting the press access to information not otherwise available to the public would be tantamount to giving the media a special privilege.

*The Business Journal* has appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit.

Actions like those taken by Ehrlich and McKelvey are not limited to the print media. Cleveland mayor Jane Campbell recently barred city workers from talking with reporters from WOIO-TV after the station aired a story about Cleveland police officers earning overtime by driving Campbell and her family around the city and out of state. There too, a federal district judge refused to grant WOIO the temporary restraining order it sought against the mayor.

"The mayor may exercise her right not to speak to certain reporters that, in

her opinion, she views as untrustworthy or irresponsible...Mayor Campbell may make the determination that city administrators and employees may not comment on behalf of the city to members of the media."

None of the media parties involved in these cases was arguing that they have a right to force the government to give them information, or that there exists a constitutional right, for example, to have phone calls returned. The question that must be addressed at the appellate level is whether, as attorneys for *The Business Journal* state, public officials can lawfully respond to critical commentary by ostracizing particular journalists. Government has always tried to tell its people not to talk to the press, but, consistent with the First Amendment, government officials certainly should not be in the business of deciding who cov-

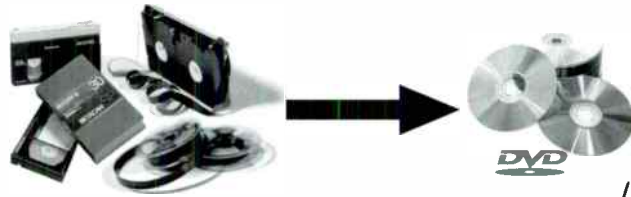
ers them based on the content of news stories. As the amicus brief filed by media organizations—including RTNDA—in support of the *Sim* stated, "It is a dangerous thing to let the chief executive be the arbiter of objectivity."

We await, therefore, rulings from the 4th and 6th Circuits with great interest. Mayor Campbell and WOIO reached an out-of-court settlement that allowed station reporters to return to City Hall and interview employees. As the law develops in this area, it is incumbent upon electronic journalists to remind politicians, listeners and viewers that blackballing based on content serves only to harm the public, which benefits from independent reporting and criticism, and to whom government leaders must be accountable.—Kathleen Kirby is an attorney with Wiley Rein & Fielding in Washington.

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## The Hiring Line

Five ways to get more out of a job interview.

One of the most important jobs you have as a manager is hiring. Whom you bring on board says everything about you and your organization. But the interviewing process can be as stilted and as uncomfortable as a blind date.

The usual routine doesn't always give you an accurate reflection of the candidate's skills, attitude or ability to fit in at your station. Over the years, I have picked up a few techniques that take the blind date feeling out of interviewing and reveal whether you have your dream candidate.

**1. Role playing.** Create scenarios and see how the job candidate reacts. For a producer, set the scene by conjuring the perfect storm for a terrible newscast: It is five minutes before your show, none of the tapes is in, your lead reporter is about to miss his slot. What do you do? Have the candidate walk through her actions to get an idea of how she thinks on her feet and how she handles tough calls under pressure. Also see how she handles difficult conversations. How would she talk to a weather talent who ignores time cues and runs extremely long on a regular basis? Her answer should help gauge her attitude toward talent and her ability to be direct but tactful. Test her ethics as well with a scenario and walk through her decision-making process.

**2. Attitude.** Attitude is everything. Managers can help writers on style, work with reporters on live shots, and coach photographers on composition. But if his attitude stinks he will learn nothing and can be a detriment to your operation. So how can you deter-



mine a candidate's attitude? Ask questions that make him reveal how he thinks and feels in situations. How does he feel when criticized? When he makes a mistake? What does he do when wrong? Ask his references these same questions to determine the candidate's attitude and motivation.

**3. Skills.** Give producers and writers a writing test. Take five national and local stories and have the writers cut them down or do a rewrite. See how they work under pressure and check their speed. Ask producers which story they would lead with or what would be the second story, to get a sense of their news judgment. Consider giving job candidates a current-events test for a window into their knowledge of the world and their commitment to journalism.

**4. Reference checks.** In our litigious world, reference checks can be challenging but they are absolutely necessary. Talk to the provided reference and ask that person for another qualified reference to get one step removed

from the person the candidate provided. Always ask how the reference knows the candidate and how long they have worked together. Aside from the standard skill-based questions, ask ones that help you determine attitude.

Have they ever seen the candidate angry? How did she act? What made her angry? How does she interact with co-workers? What do you like best about her? These types of questions help paint a more complete picture of the candidate.

**5. The visit.** With shrinking budgets for interviews, you need to make the most of every visit. Before the candidate arrives, send him an information packet that includes background about your station and city. Create an aggressive schedule. It is important that as many people as possible spend time with the candidate. Make sure the list is diverse. If the person you are interviewing is a producer, have him meet not only the anchors and director, but the production assistant or tape editors. This lets you know how the candidate might fit in with your current newsroom culture.

Make sure you sell the city as well as the station. As a tour guide, I have taken candidates on driving tours of our city. Try to find out what interests the person outside of work. If he is really into sports, show him all the arenas in town. If he is into the arts, let him know about local cultural venues.

Bottom line: Take the interview process as seriously as possible. Your hires define you. They can instill confidence in your existing staff and make



your team stronger.— Kristine Strain is assistant news director at KCNC-TV. When a newsroom position is posted, more than 100 resumes a week flood the CBS affiliate in Denver.



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## Live, With Limitations

Covering a disaster hours from the newsroom.

We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into as we drove into the red rock country of southern Utah in January 2005. The farther south we drove, the more the snow that covered Salt Lake City seemed to melt away. The assignment desk told us to just go into St. George, UT, and we'd find what we were looking for. We certainly found that and so much more.

Having come from the East Coast where flooding seems to be an annual story to cover, I was ready, complete with a warm coat and big boots. I remembered the time I watched as rushing water in West Virginia carried a FedEx truck into a light pole.

Now, I was about to see the worst damage I'd ever seen from a natural disaster.

We arrived in St. George around 4 o'clock in the afternoon. By then we heard that some homes were teetering on the edge of the Santa Clara and Virgin Rivers. These homes used to have 20- to 30-foot backyards. The rushing water had torn away at the banks. I saw the usual cars and crumpled boats float by, but standing next to a home that had just been built in the last month, and watching its backyard fall away, piece by piece into the river, we knew we were about to be part of something much more dramatic and much more emotional. We set the tripod and watched as the brand new home lost its footing and shattered into pieces in the river. That was house number 1. We still had 24 to go.

Looking back, the three of us—the photographer, the satellite truck operator and I—could have planned a little better for this story. When the photog-

rapher and I were trying to get all this great video of homes falling in the river and cars being swept away and people rushing to get things out of their houses, we were also fielding calls from the desk wondering what our status was. Back at HQ, everyone was watching the competition and seeing homes falling in the river on live television. "Why don't you guys have that?" they'd ask. The other stations had 10 reporters and 15 photographers on the



Reporting live from southern Utah, John Klemack and his crew of two were flooded for five days and four nights.

scene. The three of us were it for KSTU-TV. And yet, with limited resources, our station carried the ratings the whole week. We credit that to great footage, great storytelling and great characters.

In a local disaster, everything moves fast, and being first and accurate is key. But having the elements of a great story is also very important and something even the everyday news viewer can appreciate.

**The desk factor.** The assignment desk was five hours away. Keeping in touch wasn't easy, but it was possible. We checked in constantly with the Emergency Operations Center, but

hourly calls to the desk kept us up to date on anything we may have missed. The assignment manager made a call every hour letting us know the latest numbers on victims and homes that had fallen in the rivers. By keeping in close contact, we had the information needed to get on the air.

**The character factor.** Every night, we went live from the action—from homes hanging on the edges of riverbanks, to the top of a picnic table covered in mud, to the river itself with debris flowing past us. But more importantly, we had the characters who made the story. With a simple question, we got a whole story every time. Witnesses recalled standing in front of their homes, watching them split apart, tossing insulation in the air like confetti and then, nothing, or as one woman put it, "The river ate it."

**The team factor.** Nothing can be accomplished without working together as a team. Sure, we were limited, but when my photographer couldn't see a moment about to happen, I became his eyes. When I couldn't find the word to bring the bites together, he became my editor. And the satellite truck driver brought that monster of a truck to the spot we'd show our viewers that night.—John Klemack is a reporter at KSTU-TV in Salt Lake City. You can reach him at [jklemack@fox13.com](mailto:jklemack@fox13.com).

The biggest live story to hit the United States is Hurricane Katrina, which left radio and TV reporters with few resources for covering the story along the Gulf Coast. To read about how stations dealt with the crisis in the initial days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, see page 4 of this issue. Look for more on the aftermath of Katrina in the next issue of Communicator.

For newsroom resources related to Hurricane Katrina, log on to [www.rtnda.org/sow/katrina.shtml](http://www.rtnda.org/sow/katrina.shtml).



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## Do Unto Others

Remember your mentors when helping young hires.

Every anchor or reporter can probably point to at least one person who had an enormous role in helping him figure out what he was doing right on the air. That mentor most likely passed along important life lessons, not directly related to the workplace.

After nearly 40 years in broadcasting and about 30 of those in radio journalism, I think of people who pointed me in the correct direction in life and in work. Remembering them, and what they did for me, helps as I try to mentor others in the profession.

**Give them a chance.** A program director at what was WEAW-AM/FM in suburban Chicago was willing to give an enthusiastic teenager a chance on the radio. The caveat: Mow the lawn and paint the AM tower fences during the week, and you can run the board on Saturdays. He spent time critiquing my on-air sound, and offering me the chance to work varying shifts to gain the full range of experience.

**Return their calls.** As an eighth-grader writing for the school newspaper, I was paying attention to radio, listening to the hits and disc jockeys on WLS-AM and WJJD-FM. I decided to write about being a radio DJ, and, not knowing you weren't supposed to do such things, I called the station. One of the jocks, Bob Hale, called me back and was most generous with his time in talking about how he got into the business and how he prepared for his show. The interview was quite a coup, but more important, he seemed to sense my sincere interest in the business and



told me what I would have to do to become an announcer.

**Expect more.** Ira Bitner, the news director at WIRL-AM in Peoria, IL, in the mid-1970s, was unflinching in wanting his newsroom to beat the heck out of the competition. In those days, WIRL had a four-person news department (as did the two other major stations in Peoria), and we were always in a race to be first with the story, not to mention correct. When my finished product wasn't up to Ira's standards, he let me know in no uncertain terms. More than a few nights, I was dressed down for what he considered poor grammar or entirely missing the point of a story. I did survive, though, and worked my way up to his expectations if for no other reason than to say, "I'll show you," and prove I could.

**Coach them along the way.** Max Ustler, associate professor of journalism at the University of Kansas, recalls a former student's tactic for finding a job. Lara Moritz, current anchor at KMBC-TV, in Kansas City, MO, communicated regularly with the station's news director, Brian Bracco, while she was working on her master's degree in the 1990s. Bracco coached Moritz in how to obtain her first broadcast news job. That insight helped her land a job as anchor/reporter at KSNT-TV, in Topeka, KS, before moving on to KMBC.

**See the bigger broadcasting picture.** Devon Scott and I worked together at WMBD-AM in Peoria, IL. When asked what I had communicated to her as a mentor, she notes "patience" as well as making the effort to rise above negativism in the workplace and look at the bigger picture. Today, as news director at WXNT-AM in Indianapolis, she mentors radio students at Purdue University and assists in the writing of a staff manual for Purdue Student Radio.

**Recognize talent.** Whether you are an anchor, news director or reporter in radio or television, be ready to provide some teachable moments for someone who has a genuine interest in broadcasting. If they show native talent, enthusiasm and a desire to learn, reach out and help them, as, most likely, someone did for you. That mentee won't forget the effort, and neither will you, the mentor.—  
Michael Throop is an anchor/reporter at KCMO-FM in Kansas City, MO. A Dominican monk in his former life, Throop knows a thing or two about mentoring.







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# Winning Weather

Producers can improve the forecast.

Your station may have a solid weather team backed by the latest technology and great promos, but there's another important strategy to winning weather. Producers must embrace weather's importance and connect with meteorologists to add value to newscasts.

"Weather is not a three-minute recess," says Heidi Gojkovich, executive producer at KCCI-TV in Des Moines, IA. Gojkovich tells producers that weather is number one, major weather stories deserve time, thought and resources, and the meteorologist should be at the center of the coverage.

"That takes a lot of communication between

the top of the show. To create or maintain a strong weather image, producers must weave the meteorologist throughout the coverage and think of inventive angles to showcase his skills.

The work doesn't end when local threats subside. Producers should seize every opportunity to highlight their weather team in the news block.

When weather delayed the August landing of the space shuttle *Discovery*, KCCI included an explanation by the meteorologist. Reports on the devastating tsunami in Asia last December got the same emphasis.

"Weather people



WGCL's Gene Norman (above) and KCCI's John McLaughlin (top) make weather news.

the producer and the meteorologist," she says. "If there's a storm moving into the metro area, we know where crews are to get the meteorologist the elements he will want, and we work closely with him to make sure he has what he needs to tell the full story."

During severe local weather, producers traditionally focus on the stories from the field, discussing with the meteorologist how much time is needed for the breaking weather hit at

## Five Ways To Improve Weathercasts

1. **Share**—Tell your weather team about video on feeds or other information to make the weather presentation more interesting.
2. **Commit**—Make a pact to consider weather a working part of the format. This means reducing time devoted to weather when local information is routine and yielding as much as needed when local weather threats are critical.
3. **Understand**—Discuss your station's weather brand with management and then reinforce it.
4. **Prepare**—Meet with meteorologists, the news director and engineers before weather systems develop to learn the station's capabilities.
5. **Learn and lead**—Keep up with the latest technology to report and distribute weather information and volunteer to lead the project.

need to tell producers where their expertise is and how they can add value," says KCCI chief meteorologist John McLaughlin. "And producers need to visit the weather office when there's a news story involving weather or science."

This concept of meteorologist as station scientist is one McLaughlin promotes as a retired chair of the American Meteorological Society's Board of Broadcast Meteorology. Joining him is Gene Norman, chief meteorologist for WGCL-TV in Atlanta and chairman of the AMS Committee on the Station Scientist.

At WGCL, Norman holds impromptu sessions to remind producers what key weather terms mean. As watches or warnings are issued, his producers know when it's time to reshape the newscasts.

Norman also encourages producers to learn about their stations' weather tools. This summer, WGCL's lightning detection system was put to use when a news crew discovered that a house fire may have been caused by lightning. A quick-thinking producer had Norman provide his analysis to lead the story.

"If I show them something our computers can do, they may think of a way to use it that we hadn't thought of before," he says. "I'm in my insular world of weather and they're in their insular world of writing news, and maybe the two can come together."

At KCCI, Gojkovich says producers talk with their meteorologists every day, and not just to write weather teases. "Your meteorologist will be pleased if you're working to help find video and interesting tidbits," she says. "It will improve your relationship and improve your newscast as well."—Paula Pendarvis, a news consultant and independent producer/freelance writer in New Orleans, is married to WDSU-TV chief meteorologist Dan Milham. Both evacuated safely the day before Hurricane Katrina hit.

It's not just about  
the news release

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It's about building the  
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## Weather Tools

Technology keeps pace with the changing forecast.

Weather tools have made news this year. A new forecasting model predicted the landfall of Hurricane Katrina 72 hours in advance. A portable digital device enabled Kansas reporters to deliver coverage when conditions were too severe for conventional ENG masts.

Better forecasting models and precise neighborhood-level forecasts have enabled crucial information for viewers, not to mention more comfort at countless picnics and ballgames.

With this progress comes more options for data, displays, forecasting computer models and other products and services. Here, we try to make sense of the newest choices in multi-platform weather tools.

### Tools for TV

A weather radar display system called Doprad Fury detects a tornado vortex and places an animated icon on the display. An upgrade called Photo-Realistic Maps places the radar display over high-resolution satellite images.

**Advanced Designs Corporation:** 812.333.1922 or [www.doprad.com](http://www.doprad.com)

The Weather Windows radar control and display now works on Linux, enabling features including detection of wind shear and other severe weather phenomena. A new Simultaneous Dual Polarization Radar gathers

more data and better compensates for clutter. **Enterprise Electronics Corporation:** 334.347.3478 or [www.eecradar.com](http://www.eecradar.com)

Titan depicts weather events and neighborhood forecasts with high-quality 3-D images using radar data. Its forecast model generates precise 48-hour forecasts of major weather events. Its Pinpoint Query allows a meteorologist to automatically call up a data display for a specific point of interest using a touch-



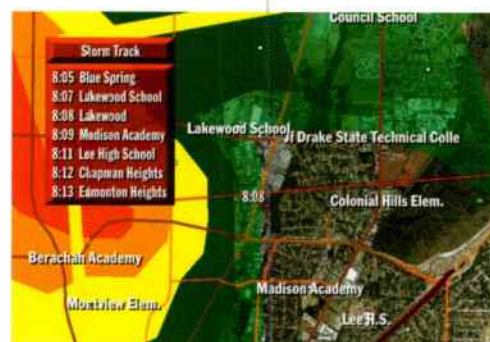
AccuWeather's Wireless Weather sends radar images to cell phones.

screen. **WSI:** 978.983.6300 or [www.wsi.com](http://www.wsi.com)

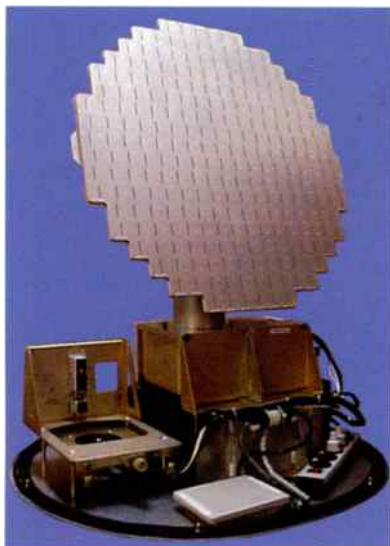
ESP Live, also outfitted with a touch-screen feature, is a severe weather system that can display 3-D radar images from up to five Nexrad sites. The Super MicroCast forecast model accurately predicted landfall of Hurricane Katrina within one mile and five minutes of what actually happened. **Weather Central:** 608.274.5789 or [www.weathercentral.tv](http://www.weathercentral.tv)

Screen. **WSI:** 978.983.6300 or [www.wsi.com](http://www.wsi.com)

### AccuWeather's Galileo and Baron Services' Viper track the path of a storm.



WSI's Titan and Weather Central's ESP Live are outfitted with touch-screen features.



ADC's portable C-band Doppler radar takes weather on the road.



WSI's PowerScreen can be customized on station websites.

The new modules on the Galileo weather animation system analyze and predict movement of severe weather. Predictive Radar uses the look of radar to show viewers the path of severe weather for the next four hours and is more accurate than numerical models, according to the company. **AccuWeather:** 800.566.6606 or [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com)

The updated Viper system has a feature called MicroTrac that takes the viewer through an area in the path of a storm, highlighting important locations such as hospitals or malls. Baron's new air quality forecast model incorporates ozone and particulates readings, areas of increasing concern for asthma sufferers. **Baron Services:** 256.881.8811 or [www.baronservices.com](http://www.baronservices.com)

TV SelectWarn displays new National Weather Service geocoded (latitude/longitude) storm warnings that are more precise than countywide warnings. The system also shows current ground confirmation of storm damage, rainfall amounts, lightning and natural hazards such as fires and earthquake shaking



WeatherData's Storm Hawk uses GPS technology in the field.

areas. **WeatherData:** 316.265.9127 or [www.weatherdata.tv](http://www.weatherdata.tv)

### On the Web

WeatherBug, AccuWeather and others deliver station weather reports to viewers' desktops. WSI's PowerScreen can be customized to include station branding, advertising news and weather. Weather Central's MyWeather can generate a forecast for a specific location, such as a high school football game, or a general area using a clickable map.

### On DTV Sub Channels

AccuWeather, Weather

Central, Weather Metrics and WSI and others provide services that program one or more digital secondary channels with constant weather programming.

WSI's PowerStream DTV can leverage up to 25 streamed versions of the DTV channel to the Internet. For example, the DTV display could be combined with Internet data for ads on a kiosk in a point-of-purchase context such as an auto dealer or mall.

Weather Metrics offers 24x7 Weather.Net, an automated content management system that integrates infor-

mation from multiple sources and displays it for a cable or DTV sub channel. **Weather Metrics:** 800.869.6629 or [www.weathermetrics.com](http://www.weathermetrics.com)

### On the Move

AccuWeather's Wireless Weather can send radar images to many cell phones with the ability to zoom and alert the subscriber of developing weather. The program is free to stations with co-branding and sharing of wireless subscription revenue.

WeatherBug Zoom shows on-air data and images from a proprietary network of 8,000 neighborhood data-gathering stations nationwide at schools and government facilities. Zoom can alert station personnel via Internet or text messages when conditions at designated data stations exceed thresholds set by the staff. **AWS Convergence Technologies:** 800.544.4429 or [www.weatherbug.com](http://www.weatherbug.com)

Advanced Designs Corporation's new Super Tactical System, a portable C-band Doppler radar including a light radome, tripod and transport case, allows stations to take weather reports on the road.

WeatherData's Storm Hawk acts as a personal digital assistant with Global Positioning Satellite technology. The PDA quickly records site data and images in the field and transmits them back to the station to go on air.

**Michael Murrie** is a professor at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA. You can reach him at [michael.murrie@pepperdine.edu](mailto:michael.murrie@pepperdine.edu).

### Weather Resources

For the latest in weather technology, check out these vendors.

**AccuWeather:** 800.566.6606 [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com)

**Advanced Designs Corporation:** 812.333.1922 [www.doprad.com](http://www.doprad.com)

**AWS Convergence Technologies:** 800.544.4429  
[www.weatherbug.com](http://www.weatherbug.com)

**Baron Services:** 256.881.8811 [www.baronservices.com](http://www.baronservices.com)

**CDR Software:** 408.461.0277 [www.cdrdev.com](http://www.cdrdev.com)

**Enterprise Electronics Corporation:** 334.347.3478  
[www.eecradar.com](http://www.eecradar.com)

**Weather Central:** 608.274.5789 [www.weathercentral.tv](http://www.weathercentral.tv)

**WeatherData:** 316.265.9127 [www.weatherdata.tv](http://www.weatherdata.tv)

**Weather Metrics:** 800.869.6629 [www.weathermetrics.com](http://www.weathermetrics.com)

**WSI:** 978.983.6300 [www.wsi.com](http://www.wsi.com)



# Tough Calls

## THE QUESTION:

The local police department asks you not to air exclusive images related to an ongoing murder investigation. Do you comply or air the images?



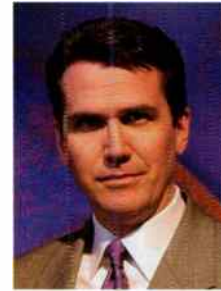
**SANDY BOONSTRA**  
Assistant News Director  
WTVF-TV  
Nashville, TN

The first thing I would do is discuss the situation with the reporter doing the story and try to determine how legitimate the request really is. I would not simply take the request of the police department at face value. I would want to make sure the source is one of authority. I would also want to be clear about the consequences if we went with the story. Having said that, I do respect and value having a good working relationship with the local police. Fortunately, NewsChannel 5 has developed dependable sources within the local police department, so there is a trust at stake as well as a story. While every news director gets excited about having an exclusive, I would proceed with caution, especially if we are told the story would jeopardize the investigation. I would discuss other options with the reporter. It may not have to be an all-or-nothing decision. Maybe there is a way to air a portion of our exclusive material without jeopardizing the investigation. If not, I would hope that the images we have would hold a few hours, or even days. The bottom line is I would try to find a way to keep our exclusive and at the same time maintain the trust we have worked so hard to build with the local police.



**WOODY COATES**  
Assistant News Director  
WWBT-TV  
Richmond, VA

The decision to air the pictures or comply with the request has to be based on the police department's reasoning. "It will interfere with our investigation" is not enough. The department must offer solid evidence as to how the broadcast will hurt them. There have been times when we have decided not to air a suspect's "mug shot" because the police have not finished their suspect lineups. This is a logical and reasonable request. Broadcasting a photograph could certainly affect a victim's memory. There have also been times when we have been asked to move a live camera or helicopter shot because the police knew the "bad guy" was watching us on TV. Broadcasting pictures of police locations could give the suspect information that might compromise an arrest. More often we hear, "We are not ready to release that information yet." That response should cause us to dig deeper. We know we are on the right track. In my experience, both police departments and journalists have a common goal. Both want a safe, informed community. Whether the pictures are "exclusive" or not, the decision must be based on whether the community is served by their broadcast. That decision can only be made when law enforcement is up front about its case and trusts the photographers, reporters and producers involved. Good sourcing is the most important tool in journalism.



**LEE ELDRIDGE**  
News Director  
WROC-TV  
Rochester, NY

While the question is vague and leaves open many unknown circumstances, this tough call occurs more often than one would think, especially in today's aggressive approach to investigative journalism. If the images interfered with what is soon to be an arrest, if they put an officer or citizen in danger or caused related criminals to be tipped off and escape the law, then I would assure law enforcement that the news operation would hold and not air those images until a later date. But I would hope to build such a relationship with law enforcement, and the DA's office, that when we comply with such matters and sacrifice such exclusivity, in turn, we be given advance notice to the break in the story. I have even gone to the police in advance, making them aware of sensitive material they did not know we had, only to be granted an exclusive insider or embedded position. This advanced the story even more, but did not interfere with justice. If executed, positioned and branded properly within the news-cast content, the news operation can benefit even more from this approach than from just airing the original images. As a result, the story and how we handled it will weigh much heavier and more positive with the public. The station and its news operation will be seen as more credible, responsible and trustworthy in the eyes of its existing and future audience.

Send your Tough Calls ideas to [toughcalls@rtnda.org](mailto:toughcalls@rtnda.org).

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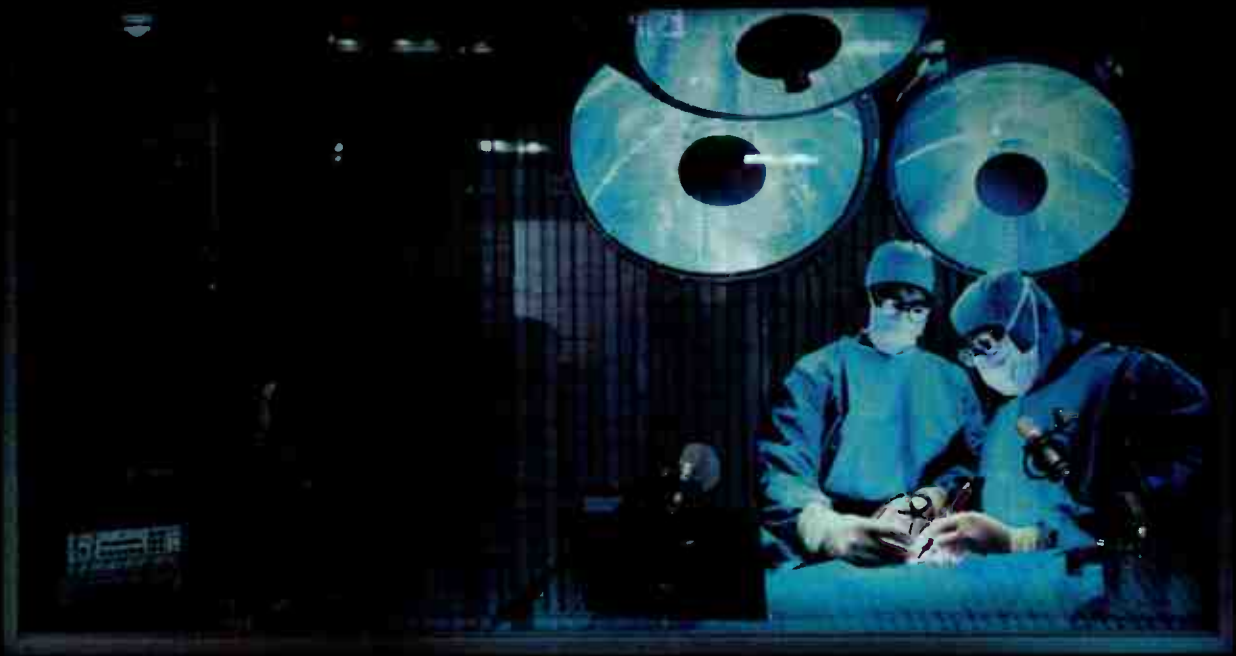
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