

Clay's Corner for January 2010

Welcome to the new year ! Gee, we managed to escape Y2K + 10.

Last year at this time we here in Western Washington were putting up with lots of snow and ice – This year, relatively dry and mild. This is very good news in light of the Howard Hansen Dam situation. Thus far mother nature has been very kind.

Just before Christmas Entercom closed on their deal selling their transmitter sites at Cougar and West Tiger mountains to American Tower Company. These two facilities were very much part of my life for many years...West Tiger since 1987 and Cougar for the last 10 years. Entercom, like a lot of broadcasters, has been going through tough times and apparently a shot of income was just what the doctor ordered. The company sold a number of their other sites across the country as well. Over the years, ATC has become the big frog in the tower business with over 20,000 towers and sites. This move will give them 3 facilities on West Tiger and 2 on Cougar.

Along with this change Entercom, my employer for the last 13+ years, advised me that it was time for a change in status for me. Whether or not I will continue to have a relationship with them, at this point, remains to be seen. If not, I will likely strike out on my own and join others that don't have a full time job but rather rely on a number of smaller paychecks. Hanging out ones 'shingle' is a bit daunting...hopefully things will work out well.

Enough of me – How about other stuff – Like looking back on this past decade for some interesting tidbits.

> The economy has certainly been the big story the last couple of years as we all saw our 401K's sink. Looking at the Dow over the past 10 years is interesting....It's off about 1000 points since 1-1-2000. (Note how I overlooked the period in the middle)

> The number of people un-employed is a sign of the times. Ten years ago it was under 6%, today its more like 15%

> Life expectancy is up by about a year over the last 10..Guess this means I have to work longer?

> Film cameras have died. It's rare that you find someone today that does not have a digital camera.

> Percentage of homes with land-line phones is down from 96 to 91% while those that own cell phones is up from 36 to 71%. Some have land-line phones only because it comes with DSL.

> Cell phones have been transformed from simple wireless telephones to devices that do things that were thought impossible 10 years ago. Some of us are still not impressed.

> Number of PC's sold in 1999 – just under 15,000....in 2009 - - just under 30,000.  
Number of laptops sold in 99 – 7200, in 2009 – almost 19,000.

- > How about the Yellow Pages? Does DEX know about his life expectancy?
- > We have seen the death of the Pay-Phone. Recently a restaurant I frequent had someone come in and pay the owner \$150 for the one on the wall that hadn't been used in some time.
- > 10 years ago we had no idea what an I-pod or I-phone was, not to mention U-Tube, Twitter, Facebook etc. Then there are Apps.
- > TV's became flat and larger and then miniature with tiny screens being the current rage.
- > GPS has become common to zillions of devices and millions of people now depend on them. I still wonder what would happen should a huge solar flare knock out those birds!
- > Cable has changed the TV landscape forever. No longer are we able to complain about re-runs of Leave it to Beaver....Now we have 100's of channels of not-much to complain about.
- > Telling time has changed too – Analog time indicators are becoming scarce, as are those that know how to read them.
- > Tape, of all kinds, has gone away...Yet we STILL see pictures of a 10inch reel to reel whenever TV runs a phone recording. That will probably last 10 more years as even though tape is gone, the term is still used by the talking heads that just can't bring themselves to say 'server'
- > A whole generation is emerging that lack telephone or personal communications skills. To deal with that we may all have to quit talking and take up texting to communicate with them. Wonder how many young people know what Dial-Tone is?
- > The FAX machine is just about dead, certainly in the next 10 years it is likely to become a dinosaur.
- > Broadcast TV finally made the switch to digital and now has challenges to remain a viable industry
- > 10 years ago the TV antenna was forgotten, now it's been re-discovered. Even Rabbit Ears are being re-discovered by a generation that has no idea what an aerial is.
- > New is on-line everything from dating to TV programs to ....you name it.
- > Newspapers are dying at an alarming rate. You tell someone about something you read 'in the paper' and if they are not over 50 they wonder what you are talking about. In 10 more years you have to wonder if any will survive.
- > Paper Instruction manuals have gone away, today's equipment comes with a CD.
- > Advertising brochures and catalogs have met a similar fate...today you'd better be ready to shop on-line.

> Snail mail is rapidly being replaced by email to the point that the Post Office is in a quandary. When someone asks for your address you are more likely to give them your email address.

> Print advertising no longer tells you where the firm is located but rather gives you their Web Address – [www.kindascary.com](http://www.kindascary.com)

> And for sure, the typewriter is gone. For a while we used to have one around to deal with envelopes, but now that those are history.....

> Surprisingly there are some terms that are still with us – TV, Radio and Wireless.

> Component level servicing is something else that has gone away. The term is still here, it's just that the components are larger.

> Compression has invaded everything – TV Spots are (again) loud...to the point that Congress is restless. Recording studios have apparently declared all out war on dynamic range. Highly compressed MP3's have become the new gold standard for audio. Digital compression has made possible digital TV, Radio, Cell Phones and a slew of devices that been made possible by throwing away parts of the original.

> One thing we have all become familiar with - AARP, Medicare, Aging, and the feeling that perhaps we should have chosen some other vocation.

One of the big news items of late has been the fact that all those wireless devices take up spectrum and the growth of this industry is causing significant pressure to get more of it. Whereas the good Lord is no longer making the stuff, the race is on to get it from someone else. And guess what? Broadcasting is again under the cross-hairs of those that would like to see us give up what we have for their benefit. If you think about it for a moment, what in the world happened to those that are supposed to manage this finite resource when they decided to create a checkerboard pattern of TV station use across the country? Would it have been possible to better use the TV broadcasting spectrum in such a way that there could have been a number of open channels, nationwide, rather than a open channel here and there? I just don't get it.

I spotted these jewels on a recent newspaper ad insert – An add for component video cables ...Get this – “Uses dielectric insulation” .....all I can say is Wow !

As I write this we are getting close to the market wide test of the new 2GHz ENG band plan, hopefully all will go well as we make another milestone change in the way we do TV. Congrats to Greg Thies who has been working this issue for some time.

Here's an item that I spotted recently – It's a list of recommendations for travel to a certain mountain top transmitter site – Full tank of gas, 2 gallons of drinking water, 5 day supply of MRE's, warm clothing and a blanket, Tire Chains, always a 4x4 (never a 2wd vehicle), portable GPS, 10 day supply of medications, First Aid Kit, Pen and Paper to leave a note in the event you have to walk out, a crank-type flashlight, a good walking stick and.....Always tell someone where you are going and when you should be expected and check in often. Where is this advice for, you may ask? Tiger Mountain? Nope – Travel to Mt Wilson, near Los Angeles. Come to think about it, this is good Advice for traveling to our mountain top sites in this area too.

The economy seems to be improving, according to those that are employed that make these predictions. In broadcasting, Clear Channel has been able to tap into new funds while Citadel has been forced into bankruptcy.

One light at the end of the tunnel ....Elections are coming again. Granted we are several months away from the beginning of the political spending season. Some are predicting that there could be as much as 3 Billion bucks to be spent. Just what our industry needs.

Have you tuned to 87.7 or 87.9 lately on your FM radio? Well don't be surprised if you hear an un-licensed radio station. This is not a local situation....From what I understand this situation has become a national epidemic. In some cases, these 'FM stations' are really Channel 6 stations operating without video in a clear attempt to thumb their nose at the Commish.....with the FCC, thus-far, not being very effective. Kind of reminds me of the days when CB was the rage and the un-licensed crowd overwhelmed the Feds. Guess if enough do it, it eventually will become OK.

Every wonder of the Feds are going to test the national portion of EAS? Well, it's finally going to happen. The first test using an EAN...The Event Code that everyone's EAS box is pre-programmed to respond to. This first test, early this month, will be in Alaska. It will be interesting to see how it works out.

Ford is apparently taking HD Radio quite serious as it has become the leading American car maker to embrace the technology. They have now taken it a step further by not only installing HD radios in this vehicles but have incorporated the 'tagging' feature that enables listeners to order up tunes they hear on the air for loading into their personal entertainment systems. I have long felt that had it not been for the car radio, radio would have likely died with the advent of TV. The historic relationship between the two is now being expanded at the local level with the transmission of traffic information that is sent to vehicles via radio ...and now tagging has been added. In this new decade, look for even more opportunities for these two historic items to work together.

A 'dark' AM station in Greenville, SC, was recent hit by thieves who made away with, reportedly 100,000 in equipment. I would think that the, off the air, station would be a beacon to those that prone to this line of work.

The Seattle area has pretty well adjusted to the new means of rating determination, the PPM. Now another PNW market is about to come on line....Portland. I'm sure that there is a lot of hand-wringing going on down there to see what kind of picture PPM paints in the Rose City. Certainly a number of historic 'apple-carts' were upset in this area with the change. Reports are the biggest loser with the switch to PPM was Classical Music stations, Talk format also lost. By the end of this year, 2010, Arbitron will have almost 50 markets running this system.

KUSE-LD has become the 5<sup>th</sup> TV station to go on the air from West Tiger Mt on Ch 46.

For many years there has been an effort by many to get more technical expertise at the FCC. Finally some news on that front. The following is from Vinny Lopez, President of SBE –

## **Senate Bill S. 2881 would add technical expertise to FCC Commissioners' offices**

**December 16, 2009 Indianapolis, IN** - A bill introduced on Monday in the U.S. Senate would potentially add one electrical engineer or computer scientist within each of the offices of the five FCC Commissioners.

Introduced by Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and co-sponsored by Senator Mark Warner (D-Virginia), Senate Bill 2881 would authorize each FCC Commissioner to add one staff assistant position to the three that are currently authorized. The new position of "staff engineer" would require that the holder either have a degree in electrical engineering or be a computer scientist. If eventually passed, the new authorization would affectively undo a loosening of requirements for technical staff at the highest level of the FCC that began more than 25 years ago.

Vinny Lopez, CEV, CBNT, president of the Society of Broadcast Engineers (SBE), remarked, "Ensuring the technical integrity of the FCC decision-making is perhaps our most important legislative goal. This legislation will go a long way toward returning technical expertise to the FCC Commissioner's offices." Lopez added, "We encourage other members of the Senate to support this well-crafted legislation. SBE will seek the introduction of a companion bill in the House and we will urge rapid passage of both Bills in the House and the Senate."

The proposed legislation, which would amend Section 4(f)(2) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 154(f)(2)), explains that the "staff engineer" would provide each commissioner with technical consultation when appropriate and interface with the Office of Engineering and Technology, Commission Bureaus and other technical staff of the Commission for additional technical input and resources. The staff engineer would need to hold an undergraduate or graduate degree from an institution of higher education in their respective field of expertise.

The last serious attempt to increase the technical resources within the Commissioner's offices was in October of 1991 when then Rep. Don Ritter introduced HR. 3501, which would have required that at least one member of the Commission be skilled in the engineering sciences. Senator Snowe's bill would not seek to replace any of the existing staff assistants in each Commissioner's office but rather authorize each Commissioner to add one assistant.

The Society of Broadcast Engineers is the professional organization of television and radio engineers and those in related fields. SBE has more than 5,500 members in 114 chapters across the United States and in Hong Kong. SBE members can also be found in more than 20 other countries. Most chapters meet monthly and offer educational programs and an opportunity to network with other engineers. SBE offers the largest and most recognized certification program for broadcast engineers, operators and technicians, with more than 5,000 certifications currently active. The SBE also offers a growing number of on-line and traditional educational courses and seminars for the technical broadcasting community.

For more information about SBE, contact John L. Poray, CAE, Executive Director, at 317-846-9000 or visit the SBE web site, [www.sbe.org](http://www.sbe.org) <<http://www.sbe.org/>> .

Vinny Lopez,  
President- SBE  
[vlopez@sbe.org](mailto:vlopez@sbe.org)

I spoke with Marty Hadfield the other day, just prior to him taking over the engineering reins at the newly formed Alpha radio broadcast cluster in Portland. One of his first challenges will be to create a new facility for the group that is presently operating from 3 different locations in the Rose City. (That must be a grind). Still hard to believe that Marty will be moving to Portland after all these years in this market. Personally, I have a lot fond memories of PDX. I move up here in 1957. (I know, that's a long time ago...)

Looks like more FM's on the band as the Feds appear to be moving forward with their long sought after plan to eliminate the requirement that LPFM's protect full power stations 3<sup>rd</sup> adjacency. This will not likely result in a flood of new stations in this area as the band is pretty packed as it is.

Could it be? The FCC taking interest, much less action, on an FM stations modulation level? In this case, yes. KRTO, in California, according to the FCC report was observed running 110% modulation. Shame shame.

I see where the Blu-ray Disc Assn has come up with a standard for 1080P 3-D movies. With the popularity of Avatar the new Sci-Fi flick....This might just be the time for the mode. Wonder how far we are from seeing 3-D broadcast TV? Would really be cool for sports.

The Comcast/NBC deal is certainly interesting. With the amount of TV content showing up on-line these days, coupled with the ever increasing percentage of folks with high-speed connections, it's not much of a mystery how Comcast seeing this going. Much of it at the exclusion of broadcast TV I fear.

Another tower fell this past month. In this case a 400 footer belonging to WRCE in Central NY, 60 miles from Syracuse. One worker was reported killed.

I would like to end this session with the following items to ponder–

***I think part of a best friend's job should be to immediately clear your computer history if you die.***

***Nothing is worse than that moment during an argument when you realize you're wrong.***

***There is great need for a sarcasm font.***

***Was learning cursive really necessary?***

***Map Quest really needs to start their directions on #5. I'm pretty sure I know how to get out of my neighborhood.***

***Obituaries would be a lot more interesting if they told you how the person died.***

***Bad decisions make good stories.***

***You never know when it will strike, but there comes a moment at work when you know that you just aren't going to do anything productive for the rest of the day.***

***Can we all just agree to ignore whatever comes after Blue Ray? I don't want to have to restart my collection...again.***

***I'm always slightly terrified when I exit out of Word and it asks me if I want to save any changes to my ten-page research paper that I swear I did not make any changes to.***

***I hate leaving my house confident and looking good and then not seeing anyone of importance the entire day. What a waste.***

***I keep some people's phone numbers in my phone just so I know not to answer when they call.***

Here's wishing you the very best in 2010 and beyond ! Hope to see you here next month.

Clay

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