

Clay's Corner

Providing news and views from a broadcast engineers perspective since September 1986

As I begin to look at my stack of notes that will become this column, I am overcome with how much the world has changed due to the outbreak of the Corona Virus. A month ago, likely no one would have predicted the situation we are all in now. All we can do is hunker down and pray that this nasty bug does not find us, or our loved ones. Perhaps the good news is that most that get it, recover. However the odds of a good outcome diminish with one's age.

Some observations:

- I recall all the warnings about preparing for the 'big-one' earthquake and how emergency officials were urging us to stock up on things so as to be able to ride out the period after the quake. Mostly these warnings were met with a nod and a smile and inaction. It was almost impossible to get anyone's attention. COVID-19 changed all that very quickly.
- The big difference between earthquake preparation and this issue is fear. Generally, people don't fear quakes as evidenced by their inaction. Many continue to smoke despite the mountain of evidence that it can kill you. Now, with people actually dying, fear is setting in.
- In the case of many disasters before, they have been centered somewhere else. Who would have thought that Kirkland would become the early epicenter of this event? As time went on, we were passed up by New York, perhaps a function of their population density?
- Every day, I receive from FEMA an update on 'Significant Incidents or Threats'. On March 23rd the major item was COVID-19. Under 'Declaration Activity' was 'Approval: Major Disaster Declaration - Washington'.
- Also on the 23rd was the announcement that Boeing was suspending factory operations in the Puget Sound area. This after the death, from COVID-19, of a worker at the Everett plant.
- Knowing that, this Virus was not only killing people, it was also killing businesses. I suspected that it would take a huge toll on many smaller radio stations in the country. This suspicion was confirmed (also on the 23rd) with instructions from Amador Bustos to turn off his KMIA in Auburn. He is doing the same with his AM, KXET, in Mt. Angel/ Salem, Oregon, asking the FCC for an STA to keep these

stations silent until further notice. Based on what's happening, these will not be the first stations in the area to go dark/ silent. I suspect the FCC will be handing out a lot of STA's for similar reasons.

- Not only are these stations going silent because of the lack of advertising revenue, but because of the fact that listening habits no longer include AM as it once did. I've written about the fragile state of AM Radio. This event will likely be the 'last-straw' for many.
- The big question is whether or not these stations will come back...or will become an entry in a history book?
- I received a call from a friend working in Radio in Oregon. The impact of the crash is reaching all that work for that outfit, with management announcing a 20% reduction in compensation. Gee, many thought iHeart was being heartless with their recent reductions in staffing.
- One piece of good news came with the Washington Governor's 'Stay at Home' order – Broadcasting workers were on the list of essential/ critical infrastructure workers. In fact, he specifically praised our industry for our efforts, and keeping everyone informed. Now, certainly this does not apply to those stations that make no effort to be sources of information.
- It will be very interesting to see how the Nielsen numbers will shift with this event. Perhaps some that provide a lot of information will go up. Or, perhaps those that are tired of hearing about Coronavirus 24/7 will be tuning to something else.
- Historically, in times like these, rumors can do more harm than good. In the past, rumors were spread person to person. Now that we have created the perfect rumor spreading machine (Social Media), rumors and misinformation and flooding people's minds are adding to the fears of many. Thankfully, many broadcasters are stepping in with the facts.
- The broadcast news media is doing a great job keeping us informed with the facts. However, the constant drone of factual news can, and is, having an impact on many. In some cases, it's having the effect of pouring more gasoline on the fire. Maybe they are burning TP?
- Sports is a huge part of our society and represents a lot of money flowing in a lot of directions. I can imagine the meetings at ESPN and TV networks that have sold time months in advance for professional and amateur sports. Those meetings must have been tough.
- I was in a favorite restaurant recently, where they have a number of TVs displaying various sports. I noted reruns of old games (one of them in B&W). On one display they had wrestling. No idea if it was live or not.

- In our town we have three radio stations that are devoted to Sports Talk. Gotta wonder how much they can dwell on 'woulda, coulda, shoulda'. Could one of these stations elect to go silent?
- Talk about timing. It was recently announced that iHeart Media stations in Seattle will be the home for the Huskies, replacing KOMO.
- Networks as well as Radio and TV stations are having it rough for a number of reasons, in addition to the lack of sporting events. Major program producers stopped production of those with live audiences. Dr. Phil and Ellen without an audience is not quite the same.
- One show did go on, as scheduled, was the Grand Ole Opry. In this case it was the normal radio program that's been on the air for 94 years...however there were 4,000 empty seats!
- Rick Van Cise, at KOMO Radio said it this way: The coronavirus story is unique in that it requires a substantial balancing act: reporting the facts and spreading awareness, but without needlessly spreading fear. Radio stations in Seattle aren't just reporting the news; they're also serving as a clearinghouse for credible, viable information.
- Local TV stations with news departments appear to be running 'full throttle' with news coverage. However, with a huge reduction in customers, will come a reduction in advertising and a reduction in income for broadcasters and this will, logically, mean layoffs.
- It's interesting how the local TV news presentation shifted with the 'Social Distancing' rules. At first, anchors were suddenly sitting as far apart as they could and be at the same desk. Then, slowly, these same folks were found reporting from home. Jackets and ties were gone and informal wear was now normal. One newscast I caught featured a long time sports announcer doing news anchor duty! Radio was doing the same thing, just that you could not see what they were wearing (perhaps a good thing).
- So what made all this remote, from home, broadcasting possible? The fact that high speed internet connections are just about everywhere. In days past, TV would have to deploy dedicated Microwave circuits and radio would be using VHF and UHF Radio.
- Probably one of the biggest news items was the cancelling of the NAB show in Las Vegas. It was clear that NAB was holding out as long as they could. On March 2nd they said the show would go on. Then, with vendors pulling out and the PREC cancelling, the writing was on the wall, and the event was cancelled. A lot of money likely went in undesired directions over that one. Then, as the crisis

deepened, many Las Vegas hotels announced they were closing...at least for a while. Apparently, the Virus is worse than all the cigarette smoke!

- Speaking of cancelled events, the Olympics, scheduled for this year in Tokyo, are now scheduled for 2021. Another hit to broadcasters that look to the Games as a source of revenue.
- Where you like me and found all the TV spots showing large groups mingling a bit interesting, in light of all the guidance to stay six feet away from your fellow creatures? Have to remember that most of these were shot during a time that this was not an issue. Guess there is no incentive to run a disclaimer.
- Boeing, who is struggling to stay afloat with their 737 Max disaster has been trying to find places to park all those unfinished airplanes. Now they have their customers in the same boat, with the airlines grounding large portions of their fleets. Perhaps this is a blessing in disguise for Boeing, as the pressure is certainly off to get those jets in the air. Right now, no one needs them.
- One aspect of all of this may well be a rise in the birthrate about nine months from now.

Then there is the matter of Toilet Paper!!...

No better evidence of fear is the irrational buying of toilet paper. The media grabbed onto this one and ran stories about it, causing more fear and more people buying more toilet paper. Fear causes people to do strange things. Panic is a powerful motivator!

One expert explained it this way: "When people are stressed their reason is hampered, so they look at what other people are doing. If others are stockpiling, it leads you to engage in the same behavior," he said. "People see photos of empty shelves and regardless of whether it's rational, it sends a signal to them that it's the thing to do.

How far will people go to get T.P.? Police Dept. in Newport Oregon posted this on their Facebook page: "It's hard to believe that we even have to post this. Do not call 9-1-1 just because you ran out of toilet paper. You will survive without our assistance."

The post then pointed out the different methods used throughout history before suggesting other items that could be used in lieu of "your favorite soft, ultra plush two-ply citrus scented tissue."

Among their suggestions: grocery store receipts, newspaper, cloth rags, magazine pages, cotton balls and even leaves. "Be resourceful. Be patient. There is a TP shortage. This too shall pass. Just don't call 9-1-1. We cannot bring you toilet paper."

Some creative folks, now apparently faced with time on their hands, came up with a

solution to the problem with their, now famous, Toilet Paper Calculator - howmuchtoiletpaper.com

This event has brought to light a number of issues with shortages, whether it be protective devices for medical personnel or T.P. I submit that a lot of these problems can be traced back to our new way to doing things. Industry calls it 'Just in Time Inventory' or JIT for short. I looked up a definition and found this:

Just in time (JIT) inventory is a strategy to increase efficiency and decrease waste by receiving goods only as they are needed in the production process, thereby reducing inventory costs.

With advances in getting products from manufacturers to those that need them in a short period of time came a big shift in thinking. Why should a maker of widgets, or a retailer, waste money creating a warehouse for items when they could order them shortly before they are needed. Today we have FedEx and UPS and many others that can get it to the end user quickly, and cheaper than stocking these items locally. This process has been widely adopted and, via the use of computers, has become SOP.

Getting back to T.P., a store knows, based on experience, just how much of it they need to order, and when. The distributor works the same way, as does the manufacturer who knows, again based on experience, just how much they need to make. No one, at any of these levels is going to stock much, for that is considered a waste. Now what happens when there is a huge spike in demand. Everyone in the supply chain is caught short.

Apparently this process was thought to not apply to medical equipment and supplies. When the demand spiked, the 'supply chain' was caught short with many politicians and citizens wondering what happened, wondering why Government could not just snap their fingers and solve the problem.

This is simply supply and demand at work. When demand is constant, it works great, when there are spikes in demand we have to wait. Now that you know that, perhaps you are like many and want to blame someone for this method. I'm here to help! The practice of using JIT was pioneered by TOYOTA in the 1970's and remains hugely popular today. Want more info? Google JIT and read all about it.

- Like all events like this, there are winners and losers. Unfortunately the list of losers is going to be very long, so, here are my thoughts on the winners:
 - o Costco
 - Lines outside their stores

- o Amazon
 - Can't deliver orders fast enough

- o Walmart
 - Always a winner in times like this

- o Fast Food establishments
 - Long lines at all of them. They are geared for take-out. Sit-down restaurants, not so much

- o Liquor Sellers
 - Ancient stress-reliever?

- o Gun Stores
 - This is scary. Are people fearful that they will need to defend themselves, or, are they thinking of doing something to themselves?

- o Consumers of Gasoline.
 - Gas prices have not been this low in a very long time.

- o The environment
 - Less vehicles on the road, less aircraft in the air equals better air to breathe, less carbon etc. Check this out:
<https://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/coronavirus-shutdowns-have-unintended-climate-benefits-n1161921>

- o People still on the road
 - Those that are still working and have to put up with our commute. Just recently, the Seattle area was ranked the 14th worst in terms of traffic congestion. The freeways are now looking like Saturdays.

As I look forward, using my fuzzy crystal ball with weak batteries, I have been asking the globe for some answers. Here is my short list:

- o How bad is this going to get?
- o What draconian measures are yet to come?
- o How long is this going to last. Is there light at the end of the tunnel?
- o When will things get back to normal...or will they ever?
- o How long will it take to repair the damage?
- o Will we look back and call this period –
 - The great market crash of 2020?
 - The recession of 2020?
 - The depression of 2020?

For the past several years, a group of 'old' broadcast types have gathered for breakfast in Auburn. On March 7th, prior to going to the electronic flea market in Puyallup, I was sitting next to Stephen Lockwood. This year was a bit different. Only a couple of the breakfast bunch was going to Puyallup, as the Corona Virus issue was just getting started. I was pleased to see Gary Hart joined us...



One of those two that went on to the Flea Market was Stephen. The rest of us swapped items we had brought to the breakfast and went on our way. Then 8 days later, Stephen posted this on his Facebook page:

Hi, I have tested positive for COVID-19. I am sequestered in a hotel in Dallas and in good care of the medical staff and the Dallas County Health department.

I tried to come home on Thursday but realized I had a fever and went to the ER. They diagnosed me with STREP and felt the need to run the COVID-19 test. This came back positive yesterday.

I seem to be through the worst of it. The fever has broken and the congestion is not too bad and seems to be manageable.

**In general terms I do not recommend this as it is most unpleasant.
I have discovered food delivery and will make it through. I need to be symptom free for 72 before I can come home.
The girls are home and well.
I have no idea of where I could have picked this up.
Please take the recommendations seriously and stay home if you can.
Please remember me before the Almighty.**

Later, his wife posted:

Hi everyone. Stephen's condition is being managed by a lovely team of medical professionals that specialize in public health matters and emergency medicine. He is stable and responding well to treatment. He is back in isolation, resting. You are welcome to reach out to him on his mobile number and by e-mail. He needs to rest so texts and email are the best way to reach him. Thank you, to all the hands and feet who have supplements that I send him in overnighted packages.

On March 20th:

So good news. My temperature is 97.8 degrees this morning so I may be nearing the end of this. Thanks for all the notes, calls and prayers. I can go home in a few days.

Dallas newspaper item about Stephen Lockwood's (Hatfield & Dawson) treatment for COVID-19 in Texas can be [viewed here](#).

I related this to several. Thus far, at this writing on March 24th, It appears I did not catch it. None the less, I consider it a close call.

Meanwhile there are other things in the news related to broadcasting:

I recently had a chat with Dave Ratener who confirm rumors that he is no longer with Hubbard, after 8 years. If I recall, he took the place of the late George Bisso. I suspect that this may have had a lot to do with the economy. Radio clusters in this area are learning to deal with reduced staffing levels, a situation that is likely to get worse.

Could KING & KONG-TV have new owners coming? Apparently, there are several that are making offers for their parent organization, Tegna... Byron Allen, Gray Television (later withdrawn), Najafi, Trinity and Apollo Global Management are names I've seen. One of the reasons is that Tegna has been doing better than many, making them a take-over target. I wonder how many of these will say 'Oh, never mind' as a result of the

free-fall of the coronavirus economy? Tegna owns 62 TV stations in 51 Markets, reaching over 41 Mega-people.

The FCC is gearing-up for an auction that would, they hope, generate just under \$10 Billion that would shift 280 MHz of the 3.5 GHz C-band to wireless uses. This would leave 200 MHz of the band for the satellite links that broadcasters depend on. That money, presumably, would be used to pay for the expenses related to the shifting in frequencies, including the cost of launching new Satellites. A very similar process was used for the TV Re-Pack.

The following item was spotted at a local electronic parts retailer in the area by Mike Brooks:



I recall installing one of these at WEAW in Evanston, Ill in the early 70's. Are there more stories to tell about this item that you'd be willing to share? How about the item that preceded this one that was made by RCA? Did any of my readers ever deal with one of these?

Early in the month, access to the transmitters at West Tiger became more difficult with a slide.



Start with cutting up the smaller stuff...



And move on to the BIG tree...



Now we can get there. Look at the size of the piece that was cut out on the lower left.



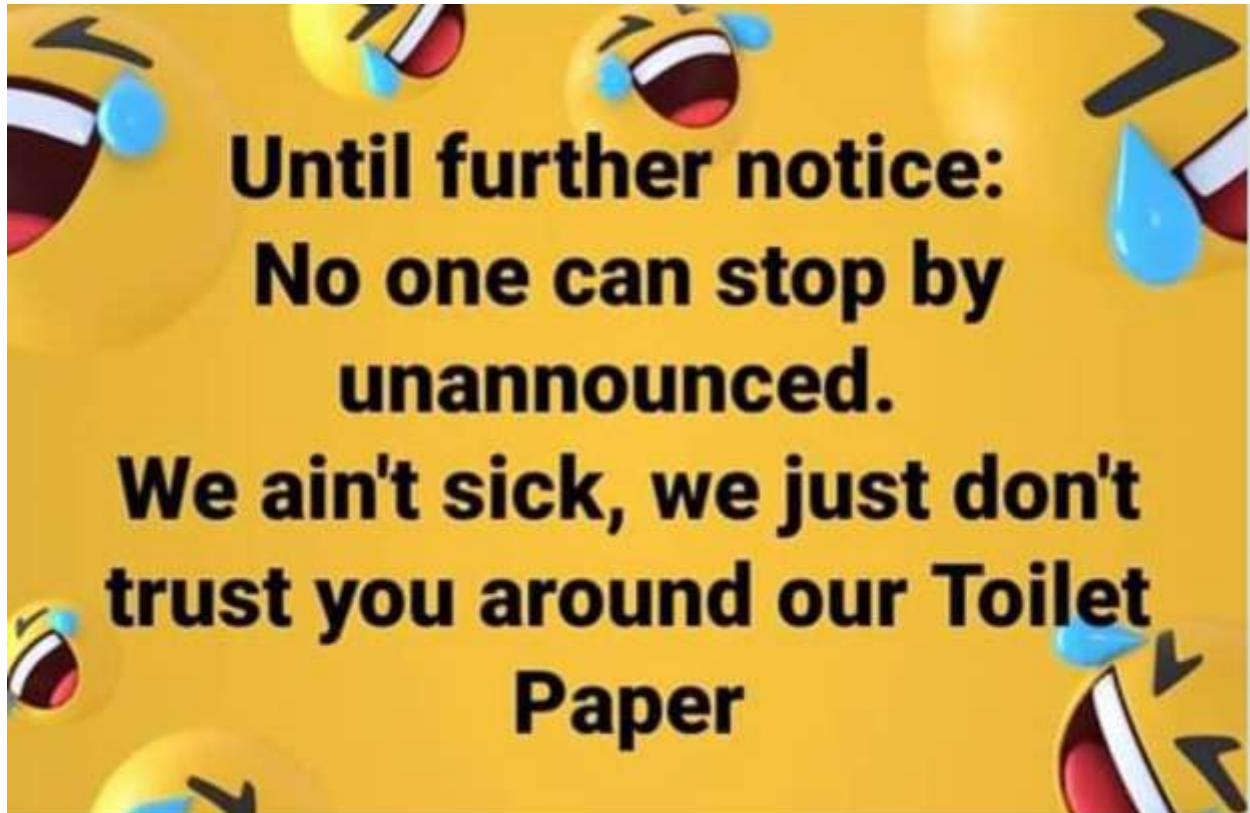
Cumulus, before the onset of the coronavirus, surrendered licenses to two of their AM stations in Macon, GA and Amarillo, TX. I suspect another examples of the demise of AM. Interestingly, both AM's had FM Translators. Contributing to the problem was their size. The Macon station was a 1,000 Watt Daytime only. The one in Amarillo was 1000 Watts day and 219 Watts at night.

On March 6th, the President and COO of iHeartMedia spoke to investors about their increased reliance on technology as they shrink their real estate foot print. This is interesting in light of the fact that the company, not long ago, eliminated 80% of their Seattle engineering department.

This past month saw Classical KING-FM move into their new, 4000 sq. ft. digs on Mercer Ave, around from their previous location at 10 Harrison. Could this have been the last PR&E Console in Seattle?

The FCC is being asked by an increasing number to approve all-digital for AM Broadcasting. Not sure, in this economic climate, whether anyone will be willing to fork over the funds to make it happen, however.

Before I close for this month, let me leave you with a bit of humor. Lord knows, in this time of panic and fear, a little humor can go a long way.



Our cleaning lady just called and told us she will be working from home and will send us instructions on what to do.

That's about it for this month, my friends. Lord willing, I will be back next month to most of the usual locations.

Until then, hunker down and stay safe!!

Clay, K7CR, CPBE

SBE Member #714 since February 5th, 1968