



The Vernon Community Radio Society

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – OCT 27, 2021

Presented by Gord Leighton

When we launched our initiative to bring non-profit community radio to Greater Vernon, we promised our members and the community a new and different kind of radio.

That was true in 2017 when we incorporated our Society, and it remains true today. But... have things changed? The answer is both YES and NO.

Let's have a closer look and you will see that two apparently opposing truths can co-exist. Begin with the word RADIO. It is both a noun and a verb. Set the verb aside, because we still "radio" people in much the same way today as years ago, as in dispatchers and two-way communication.

RADIO as a NOUN, however, has changed in myriad ways. Receivers have changed. Transmission types have changed. Transmission itself, once confined to the notion of using a fixed frequency, has also changed, and now includes pretty much any technological application to distribute content. Receivers have also changed. They are now better defined as any device that can translate radio waves or digital bits to SOUND.

Sound ... the stuff that comes out of speakers and headphones, is all that ever mattered when radio as we know it both today and yesterday is in our life. It's what you hear that matters. Always been so... and always will.

So, what's changed that matters the most? Nothing, really. Which brings me to a new DEFINITION of radio. I didn't coin this phrase, but I recognized it instantly as being true.

An updated definition of radio - an audio-first shared experience with a human connection. **“An audio-first shared experience with a human connection”**. Notably, the definition is deliberately platform agnostic for a reason: because many people are no longer using a radio to listen to the radio. And there’s nothing wrong with that!

Yes, I’m getting to the heart of my story... bear with me a little longer.

Change rarely occurs in an instant. Things evolve gradually. Sometimes, change is imperceptible when you think in units of days or weeks. But, when you reflect on years and decades, change is - or can be - monumental.

Google first appeared in 1998, less than 25 years ago. I recall arranging a seminar for the staff at CKPG Radio & TV in 1999. The facilitator walked us through the new-fangled think called a “search engine”. Google was in the embryonic stage, and the information age was poised to change everything.

Our first vision for Community Radio was anchored to broadcast transmission technology on the FM band. While we laboured over program concepts and community benefit arguments to persuade the CRTC to grant us a license; while we fussed with donation requests, sought out various grants and did our best with fundraising... the consumption of audio gradually changed. The behaviours of people changed along with technology.

Alexa and Cortana showed up in 2014. Wasn’t that like yesterday?

Spotify showed up in 2011. Sirius and XM merged in 2008.

And just this week, I saw a TV ad promoting SiriusXM with the tag line, “You don’t need a car”.

Since Podcasting began in 2004, it has emerged as a growing and popular platform with almost 40% of North Americans listening from time to time to podcasts.

The trend lines are clear, and give us a roadmap on how Community Radio will find a secure and prosperous future.

Commercial radio has changed little in the last two decades. The stations mainly focus on music and personalities, and to a limited extent, brief news updates. Common to most all commercial stations and the CBC to some degree is the notion that radio must be “live” and in-the-moment, or if not, then pretend to be.

Radio Futurologist [James Cridland](#), says the way we make radio needs to change away from “the primacy of live”. He argues that we might want to consider a different way of making the audio that doesn’t simply place live radio first, and leave on-demand to just bits hacked out of live radio. If we produce pieces of radio as great-sounding pre-produced segments of audio that can be played out on the radio, but also work well in on-demand contexts, too, then we can get the best out of all the platforms we’re on, not just one of them.

That’s where we’re headed and I think it’s exciting.

To be clear, our objectives have not changed since we filed our CRTC application in 2017. However, our objectives that expanded somewhat, and the order in which things happen has been re-arranged. We still plan to broadcast at 97.9 on the FM dial. We remain committed to a 20-percent spoken word commitment and a very deep music playlist. But, we will begin with streaming audio, providing a combination of content that is stratified in three categories:

1 – “Live” content will initially be same-day, timely content. Today’s special event, environmental reports etc., are of no relevance tomorrow.

2 – Pre-recorded content that will be archived; worthy of one or more repeat broadcasts and available “on demand”. Content of this nature will be less time sensitive, but nonetheless relevant with a respectable shelf life..

3 – Podcasts from local and regional podcasters where content has been available for download. In collaboration with the producers and copyright holders, we will broadcast the podcasts as part of our schedule, providing a megaphone and a wider audience to worthy content.

We are building a block program schedule that incorporates each of the three kinds of content. I am delighted with the number and quality of content options that have emerged thus far.

What does a steaming-only launch mean? Some folks may reasonably ask, are there enough listeners available by streaming to make this path viable.

- In fact, 74% of adults ages 25 to 54 are regularly streaming music, news, and podcasts each month
- 55% of Americans have listened to a podcast, and over 1 in 3 adults now listen to podcasts on a monthly basis
- Smart Speakers are emerging as common appliances in the home, now that over a quarter of all households own one
- Nielsen reports 75% of folks working from home are streaming music every week; 40% reported tuning in every day, the highest share percentage of media-related activity.
- 90% of all podcasts are currently enjoyed at home.
- The pandemic is shifting our increasing appetite for music, news, and podcasts away from cars, offices, and gyms and into kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms instead.

So, when can we get this started?

We originally planned to build studios and a small office that would replicate most commercial stations. We believed our path was on a smooth highway, but we found potholes on the road ahead. Unexpected fundraising challenges emerged from a lack of awareness of the benefits of community radio. No words are necessary to explain the impact of Covid, the heat dome and fires.

By happy coincidence, we also learned that advances in technology and software applications would allow us to begin delivering audio with no studios, no offices and at the outset, no transmitter. Volunteers can now begin creating content with little more than a decent laptop or desk computer and a microphone. Some content objectives may require two mikes and headsets, with a small mixer as an interface to a computer.

I believe we are likely able to fund what we need with current resources. We need some counsel from a tech-savvy person. Not quite everything is plug-and-play. In this regard, we wish our fellow member and technical wizard, Chris Cleaver, a speedy recovery from some unexpected health challenges. He is recuperating at home.

I once heard the expression, it's easier to ride a horse in the direction it's travelling, so let's saddle up and deliver on our promise to bring a community a new and different kind of radio to Greater Vernon.... and anyone in the world with an Internet connection.

In closing, I wish to thank our Board members, with a particular nod to those leaving the board this year. Vicki Proulx, our VP since incorporation, will remain a member and cheerleader, but she has a busy life as Executive Director of Vernon Winter Carnival. Thank you to Ed Rae, Charlene Thomas and John Sharpe for their contributions as Directors.

I also want to thank my friends Betty Selin and Paul Mann, who worked with Garry, Vicki, Ed and myself on the fundraising committee.

Last but by no means least, I extend my gratitude on behalf of our membership to the many donors, bidders and participants in our recent fundraising auction, which added about \$10,000 to our bank account and created a surge in awareness throughout the community.

It has been an honour to serve you and our mission to deliver a new and different kind of radio. Thank you for your kind support and attention.