

A look at Canadian student radio

By FIDELIS FITZPATRICK

Reprinted from THE CHARLATAN

Radio is a sound salvation
Sweeter than sedation...
Elvis Costello

If good radio is salvation, then Canada's student radio listening audience is well on the way to heaven.

According to a report on campus radio stations in Ontario, "Canada has the most sophisticated student radio network in the world."

But the development of campus radio is plagued by obstacles. Any radio station which has come into its own is, like universities today, constantly facing financial difficulties.

The report, published by the Ontario Radio Campus Organization (ORCO) in July 1979, says funding is a student radio station's greatest problem. It's a vicious circle: lack of money leads to poor technical quality, small staff and a small audience which does not entice investors.

Although ORCO calls CKCU-FM the "largest and best campus radio station in Ontario," it is still a victim of the financial problems plaguing other student radio stations.

CKCU depends on its annual public funding drive for just over 20 per cent, or \$30,000 of its annual costs, said CKCU-FM Station Manager Craig Mackie.

"It's urgent that we have a successful funding drive. Without the money, the station won't survive much longer," said Neil Bregman, funding drive coordinator.

The remainder of CKCU's \$147,000 operating budget for 1980-1981 will come from the students association and business sponsorships.

Mackie said it is difficult to recruit sponsorships because of a "limited commercial activity" clause in CKCU's operating license granted by the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

The clause says ads may not refer to price, quality, convenience, durability, desirability, or contain other comparative or competitive references of a product.

The clause, with the resulting limitations on ad style and content is meant to prevent campus radio stations from becoming too commercial.

In 1975, CKCU was the first campus radio station in Canada to obtain an FM licence with an advertising policy.

Prior to June 1975, FM student broadcasting was strictly non-commercial, and the three student FM stations existing at that time (CJRC-FM at Queen's, CJUS-FM at the University of Saskatchewan, and CKRL-FM at Laval University) weren't allowed to sell advertising time.

Radio Carleton, like most campus stations began as a club in 1963. Mackie said the group, called the

Carleton Radio Broadcasting Committee, started by doing a weekly half hour broadcast on CKOY called "On The Steps."

"There were problems because students working on the show had their own ideas of what they wanted to do and the radio station had theirs."

This arrangement ended in 1967 and the club started broadcasting out of a couple of speakers in the tunnels. In 1970, Radio Carleton moved into the Unicentre and began broadcasting on "carrier current" into the residence buildings. The AM radio signal was broadcast through the power system of the building.

But carrier current has poor signal quality. "Unless the buildings were properly wired, every time you turned on something electrical, you'd get an upset in signals on that floor" said Mackie.

It wasn't until 1974, under Station Manager Randy Williams, that Radio Carleton started making plans and getting materials together for an FM license. They submitted their application to the CRTC in 1974, and the license was granted on June 27, 1975.

"It was a day of mixed feelings. We had been slammed with restrictions," said Mackie, referring to the advertising clause.

At the outset, Radio Carleton interpreted these restrictions liberally, said Mackie.

"We made no mention of prices or names but got into creative commercials. We would have the sound of the ocean in a commercial, and at the end say, 'This

seaside symphony was brought to you by Rhapsody Rag.'" In its first year on air CKCU made \$80,000 in advertising revenue.

The ORCA report said this interpretation of the commercial clause by CKCU enabled the station to begin their FM broadcasting with a budget large enough to buy the proper equipment and to maintain a substantial payroll - 30 per cent of CKCU's operating budget consists of salary payments.

Mackie said it's necessary to get reasonable pay for the executive to get them to stay, reducing the usually high turnover rate of strictly volunteer organizations. "If there's continuity on the executive from year to year, more volunteers will come back," he said.

At present, the radio station is administered by two full-time and eight part-time employees.

At present, the radio station is Problems arose in the revenue department after the first year. Mackie recalled a delegation was sent from the CRTC to review Radio Carleton's advertising and they concluded the ads didn't abide by the restrictions and should not be on the air.

A public hearing was held in November 1977, and CKCU was told to "cease and desist in using adjectives, there were to be no more dramatic productions, and no more creative advertising." CKCU was also denied a license renewal. Its existing license was renewed for six months in order that the station could continue broadcasting and try again for a renewal.

Under the station's new plan that we re-drafted to conform to the CRTC's sponsorship definition, the customer sponsors a specific program. The sponsor is mentioned at the beginning, middle and end of the program.

The Commission accepted this plan in September 1977 and renewed their license. But the new license cost the station \$59,000 in lost advertising returns that year, said Mackie.

To make up for some of that revenue, CKCU scheduled the first public funding drive in November, 1978. That year they raised \$17,000.

Mackie attributes CKCU's success to the "loyalty, trust, and confidence of the audience." CKCU estimates it has a weekly audience of 55,000 people, consisting mostly of those in the 16-35 age bracket.

According to the ORCO study, CKCU's listenership is the result of its programming quality.

CFGO's program director Don Roman said CKCU's programming provides a needed outlet for a lot of unknown artists who don't get time on commercial stations. But he added he feels CKCU should do more educational, and community programming.

CHEZ-FM's station manager, Chuck Azzarello, said CKCU is like any radio station in that some things are good, and some are bad. "There's a myriad of programs to make comments on their programming is practically impossible," he said. The ORCO reports doubts whether CKCU would even exist if it hadn't had large

sponsorship revenues at the beginning.

Mackie however, disagrees. "The course of success would have taken longer to accomplish. It wouldn't have happened as fast, but it would have happened."

"A large budget is a good base to start from, but students, faculty and community co-operation are also necessary, he said. At the same time CKCU was presenting its request to the CRTC for an AM license in 1975, Radio Campus at the University of Ottawa started the first edition of its FM project.

Radio Campus which at that time was operating on an AM carrier current license broadcast only in some campus buildings, failed to make headway on its FM license. The station declined progressively until it finally closed down in 1978, for several years, said station manager Sylvain Tellier.

"There was no basic organization, no employees, hardly any technical maintenance, the studio was in bad shape with old equipment that had been wrongly wired by technicians at the beginning of the 70s who didn't know what they were doing," said Tellier.

The station's relationship with the Student Federation was very poor, said Tellier. "Nobody was agreeing on the objectives of the radio station."

Tellier said people used to complain that too much heavy rock was being played at the station. But now the biggest clash with the association is over salary

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Meet the Mercury Lynx GL Winners in the Long Distance Sweepstakes.

Sylvie Venable
Collège de Joliette



France Boisvert
C.E.G.E.P.
Sorel - Tracy



Congratulations to these three students on having won a brand new Mercury Lynx GL. We hope they have many years of enjoyable driving.

And thanks to the thousands of other students who participated.

Jeff Levitt
University of Toronto



Long Distance
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