

A sad day for radio



I believe if you sell the value of radio first, that rising tide will raise all ships.

We're our own worst enemies in the radio business. As I travel across the country I witness actual horror stories of our self cannibalization. In some markets, station operators actually reward, or offer incentives for, advertisers to not use other radio stations in the market!

We create confusion, or drive advertising dollars to other more user-friendly media, by manipulating data to present ourselves as number one or put pressure on advertisers to not increase their reach and frequency with radio by using other stations.

My most recent disgust at our seeming desire to shoot ourselves in the foot is in the implosion of the Radio Marketing Bureau.

Innovative radio leaders Allan Waters and Ted Rogers spearheaded the formation of the RMB, or should I say the RMB's predecessors the RSB (Radio Sales Bureau) and the RBC (Radio Bureau of Canada), even though they were head-to-head competitors on the street.

They recognized that their big picture competitors were other media, not other stations.

I've watched the slow demise of the

relevance of the RMB with sadness, anger and dismay over the past 10 to 15 years.

There is no doubt the RMB has become redundant or unproductive as the radio industry's marketing champion, but not because there is not a need for a vibrant industry champion. Rather, individual corporate self-interest and short-sighted budget cuts made the RMB a toothless tiger.

Shame on us.

It's not the first time I've seen industry associations fall victim to individual self interest, politics and member consolidation to the long-term detriment of the industry.

I still recall the first Radio Sales Bureau presentation I saw, just six weeks after leaving the print industry to get into radio. It was a scary transition for me to leave the comfort of a salaried newspaper position to a straight commission radio world. But the RSB presentation actually gave me goose bumps. When Larry Heywood played creative examples of the power of sound my confidence in what I was selling, radio advertising, soared. And so did my sales.

I admit that the political, budget and varied self-interests of the RMB's board members over the years rendered it irrelevant to many radio operators.

But that doesn't mean the concept of an industry marketing arm like the one envisioned by the Waters and Rogers of the world is wrong. It simply means its members and steering committees were wrong.

Here is what I foresee if we don't have the foresight to revive the RMB:

- 1) Who's going to build and train our farm teams? Over the years larger broadcasters have had a wealth of small market talent to draw from; talent that was trained by the RMB and talent that these small broadcasters could not afford to train on their own.
- 2) Who's going to set the industry's

benchmarks? While the big companies can and should train their people beyond the minimum standards of the CRAs and CRMs administered by the RMB, at least these designations did set a minimal industry standard.

- 3) Who's going to conduct the research to validate where radio over-all fits into the new media landscape? Some companies may do research to validate their company, their markets or their formats, but if no one is providing relevant research about radio, radio budgets will decline and the narrow research of self-interest won't change that national strategy.
- 4) Who's going to help all of us learn from the success of some of us? The creative and ideas housed in the RMB's archives helped many radio reps create radio advertising converts. Many of these very small local businesses become big national chains over time. If they become big without radio in their advertising DNA they probably won't convert to radio after they've achieved success.
- 5) Last but not least... if an industry's marketing association dies doesn't that send a signal that the industry itself is on the verge of a funeral?

Even secondary media such as theatre advertising is able to maintain an umbrella marketing organization, the Cinema Advertising Council.

In many ways, I personally compete with the RMB when it comes to training, idea sharing and helping stations to succeed. As a competitor, and as an industry champion, I mourn the death of RMB.

Shame on us!

Wayne Ens is a Canadian broadcast sales consultant. He may be reached at wayne@wensmedia.com or (705) 484-9993.