



CBSC – Twenty years of recognized success

CHOI-FM, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, Howard Stern, André Arthur! Monikers for the work of the CBSC.

And to be sure, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council is a model for self-regulation in the broadcasting industry that other countries come to check out on a regular basis.

The reason? It works, and it works well.

Established 20 years ago by the CAB at the instruction of the CRTC, the council has the responsibility to deal with complaints against private sector radio and TV in Canada. To date, the CBC/Radio Canada has its own complaints system.

The industry created a voluntary system of codes and regulation that set high standards for all programming according to an agreed upon set of codes, each of which have been approved by the regulator.

Through these codes, private broadcasters commit to respect the interests and sensitivities of listeners and viewers across Canada, while ensuring programming creative, editorial and journalistic freedom. And don't kid yourself, this stuff is not simple to deal with.

The five key objectives of the CBSC are:

- to assist in the effective application of specific broadcast standards developed by the CAB and the RTNDA;
- to inform the public of the existence of such standards and the self-regulatory system;
- to provide a recourse for the public regarding the application of these standards through an effective complaints procedure;
- where such complaint resolution is not possible, to render independent and objective decisions (adjudicated by

panels made up of community and broadcaster representatives) and to ensure accessibility to the public of the decisions;

- to inform broadcasters of emerging social trends (including developments in the codes and their administration) and to suggest ways to deal with them.

The chart, provided by the CBSC, shows the complaint levels at the CBSC over time. The first line shows total complaints received. The second shows the number they kept (i.e. did not send to the CRTC or Advertising Standards Canada). The third shows the number that were specific enough (date, time, broadcaster identified and relevant to some part of the codes). The last line shows the number of decisions issued (panel/summary decisions).

Of note in 2008-2009 is that the volume was at a record high.

	2004-5	2005-6	2006-7	2007-8	2008-9
Complaint Files	1,924	1,917	1,426	1,747	2,140
Dealt With	1,526	1,651	1,138	1,498	1,781
CR&S	940	1,092	689	875	998
Decisions issued	35/89	27/90	19/61	23/65	23/52

The CBSC's membership stands at 736 radio and TV broadcasters, up from 704 at the end of the previous fiscal year. Several codes comprise the council's terms of reference:

- CAB Code of Ethics (*Revised in 2002*)
 - 1988 version of Code
- CAB Violence Code
- CAB Equitable Portrayal Code
 - *Sex Role Portrayal Code for Television and Radio Programming* (1990)
- RTNDA Code of (Journalistic) Ethics (*Revised in 2000*)
 - 1986 version of Code
- Journalistic Independence Code
- Industry Code of Programming Standards and Practices Governing Pay, Pay-Per-View and Video-On-Demand Services
- The Pay Television and Pay-Per-View Programming Code Regarding Violence.

For all the output, there is a very small staff. Ron Cohen is Chair, John MacNab is Executive Director, Teisha Gaylard is Director of Policy and Solange Courteau is Communications Coordinator.

Some 70 people from across the country make up the roster of adjudicators, some regionally based to deal with local complaints and some national to deal with national networks and specialty services. About half are broadcasters while the others are from a wide cross-section of society. Out of this group is drawn the national executive which acts as the Board of Directors (of which I am one).

While citizens sometimes question whether a broadcaster-created body can monitor itself—the fox watching the hen house—the record shows an amazing history of success, especially with all the one-time offences. The problems arise with the ongoing offences, such as Howard Stern and CHOI-FM, where broadcasters might fix a problem but then the offensive content carries on—a trend that is usually quite strongly disapproved of in the broader broadcast community.

There is always need to evaluate and further build the Council, a task which becomes more important as the CAB evolves. (For more information: www.cbcs.ca).

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