

Catch the Radio Wave

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Growing up in the late 1970s, listening to music was a very important to our family. I remember Donna Summer singing about being “On the Radio” and Foreigner’s hit about a “Jukebox Hero”. Then the 1980s came, and we stopped listening to music and started watching it.

The first music video played on MTV was the Buggles’ “Video Killed the Radio Star”, and it certainly rang true. Known as the video revolution, the introduction of MTV brought about a huge shift in the music industry. Talented but ugly musicians got less airtime than their attractive but less talented counterparts.

In the 1990s, however, an ugly dude once again brought radio to the forefront. Howard Stern was the founding father of shock jocks, a breed of radio personalities that attracted listeners by pushing the envelope of outrageous behavior while giving ulcers to the folks at the FCC.

Today, though, Stern has taken radio into the stratosphere. He is star of Sirius Satellite Radio, Inc.’s lineup. Unlike traditional radio broadcasts, satellite radio is commercial-free because listeners subscribe to the service for a small fee. Satellite radio is also different because it falls outside the boundaries of federal decency rules, which is a dream come true for Stern. Before even going on the air for the first time at Sirius, Stern promised his fans to have a stripper pole, live sex and other risqué programming on his show. Agents at the FCC have gone from ulcers to strokes.

Before getting behind the microphone in Sirius’ studios, Stern got his start at Infinity Broadcasting, which is now known as CBS Radio. The broadcasting network recently filed a lawsuit against Stern for violating his contract by signing a new contract with Sirius while still employed by CBS and by promoting Sirius in his final months with the company. CBS is also alleging that Stern breached his contract by keeping audio recordings that rightfully belong to CBS.

Stern believes CBS, and more specifically its head Les Moonves, are on a mission to get back at him for jumping ship to satellite radio. At a press conference about the suit, Stern proclaimed, “I’m offended. I really do think this is a personal vendetta. Les has had it in for me for a long time. I don’t deserve it.”

Stern’s argument seems plausible seeing as CBS profited from the Sirius controversy by booking him for appearances on its news magazine show ‘60 Minutes’ and the ‘Late Show with David Letterman’ in his final months at CBS. Further, since Stern left, CBS’s radio fortunes have plummeted. He was replaced by former Van Halen front man David Lee Roth, who hasn’t been relevant since the start of the video revolution. Like his biggest Van Halen hit, CBS hopes for a “Jump” in Roth’s ratings, but so far his ratings have nosedived, much like his career after leaving Van Halen.

CBS is seeking \$500 million in damages in its lawsuit, which, coincidentally, is the same dollar amount of the contract Stern signed with Sirius in 2004.

Seeing as radio is so profitable, maybe I’ll give up writing columns and hit the airwaves. After all, I did read the daily announcements in high school over the PA system. Besides, as you can see from my cheesy picture, many people have told me I have a perfect face for radio.

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