

1



Radio's Days of Glory

THERE WAS A DAY when radio had an enormous promise all its own.

With 14,000 stations in the United States alone, in the largest cities and most remote outposts, the medium and its people were able to deliver on a local level what marketer extraordinaire Seth Godin calls the building of *tribes*. Godin's notion of tribes is any group of people, large or small, who are connected to one another, a leader, and an idea. Radio was one of those ideas. Listeners would gather around transistor receivers, disc jockeys would form bonds with station followers, and, importantly for advertisers, dedicated and passionate audience members would buy soap, car insurance, and yes, even beer, in response to the commercials, promotions, and reviews from others.

Important news was learned via the radio, such as the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The Beatles started a sensation in the same era through no small role of radio. Generations sat side-by-side transfixed on a box that delivered every pitch of World Series mastery by Bob Gibson and Sandy Koufax.

The community nature of radio is what pushed Ivan Braiker into the business in the 1970s.

“Radio in those days was all about engagement,” he recalls. “If you think about the way it was growing up 30 years ago or longer, people grew up loving their radio stations and having a great affection for the on-air personalities and having an attachment to the music they played and to the contests.

“With your circle of friends, one of the things you likely had in common was your radio station. Whether it was the Top 40 station or the hard rock station, you were defined by the friends you hung out with.”

Braiker had a decorated, 30-year broadcasting career that began much the way Mura’s did—by Braiker turning to the basics.

Hired out of school by the CBS Television affiliate in 1972, Braiker immediately broke the mold in his new sales job.

“Being young and just one on the team, no one told me I was supposed to be playing golf at 2 o’clock in the afternoon,” he recalls, jabbing at his sales counterparts who would be more apt to find the sun than the next advertiser. “So I worked. Within 90 days, I was the highest billing account executive.”

That work ethic and a sense of adventure led him to leadership and ownership of radio stations and groups, and the cofounding and presidency of Satellite Music Network, the first radio network to distribute live, 24-hour programming via satellite. It was an innovation that earned him *Billboard* magazine’s Trendsetter of the Year award.

Then, depending on how you view it, either technology came around to spoil radio’s party—think choice that listeners never had—or the arrival of the Internet, mobile phone, and digital lifestyles presented radio with opportunities Braiker argues it has not yet, if at all, fully seized.

Despite being in traditional media throughout his career, Braiker was an early adopter of mobile devices and the coming tsunami of change happening via advancements in personal technology.

“I was there with each generation of cell phone,” Braiker says. “I was one of the first on my block to own the brick [Motorola’s DynaTAC that was introduced in 1983 and considered by many to be the initial wireless phone] and one of the first on the block to own the StarTAC [sold by Motorola to consumers in 1996], which was a mere \$1,800 cheaper than the brick.

“Think about what these phones did—it’s like comparing a calculator with a computer, yet they cost so much more.”