

RADIO WORLD

Technology & news for radio decision makers

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Site safety is a tall order

And climbers aren't the only ones who need to pay attention. Clark Lindstrom and Kathy Stieler offer best practices for engineers.

Bullish on radio

We talk with Marketron's Jimshade Chaudhari and Todd Kalman.

Stations serve Hmong Americans

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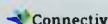
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“Well met, old friend!”

Tell us about your upcoming meeting, conference or event



Paul
McLane
Editor in Chief

Event organizers! Radio World wants to hear about your upcoming show, conference or open meeting!

My colleague Elle Kehres maintains an industry calendar that you can see on our website at www.radioworld.com/calendar.

Also, the free daily Radio World SmartBrief newsletter includes a list of events that are coming up in the next month or two.

What type of events will you find there?

Everyone knows about the NAB Show in April, but looking just a bit past NAB, I see on the calendar that the Native Broadcast Summit is set to take place in

New Mexico in early May. Radiodays North America will welcome attendees to Toronto around the same time. The Kutztown Antique Radio & Vintage Audio Show will happen in Pennsylvania.

Also in May, Louisiana broadcasters will convene in New Orleans; Missouri broadcasters will gather in Lake Ozark; Christian music broadcasters will meet in Orlando.

Thousands of miles away, both CABSAT and the Digital Radio Mondiale General Assembly will be held in Dubai, while the Media Production and Technology Show will entice attendees to London, and various media technology events will take place in Seoul, Warsaw and Singapore.

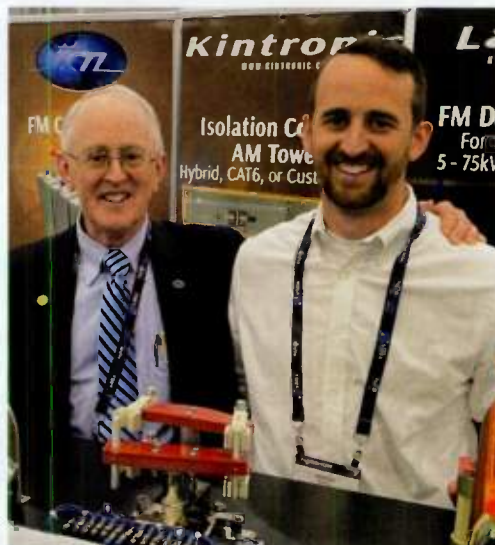
And those are all just in the month of May.

If you offer an event for radio industry professionals, submit it for listing in the calendar. In particular, associations, nonprofits and engineering groups working for the good of the industry are encouraged. Email us at radioworld@futurenet.com and put “Calendar Submission” in the subject field.



Correction

An article in the Feb. 1 issue stated incorrectly that Joshua King became president/CEO of Kintronic Labs in 2018. Although he started employment at KTL as a project engineer that year, he was promoted to his current role in 2022. Joshua King and his father Tom are shown at the NAB Show in 2022 in a photo courtesy Paul Tinkle.



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Artist Compensation


FCC Chairman Brendan Carr sent a letter in late February asking iHeartMedia CEO/Chairman Robert Pittman to answer questions about how the company is procuring talent for its upcoming iHeartCountry Festival and whether artists will be properly compensated for their appearances.

The commission recently warned broadcasters that determining airplay based on an artist's participation at reduced compensation levels in station events could violate its payola rules. "When unreported, these schemes can violate federal payola laws," Carr wrote to Pittman.

It is unusual — if not unprecedented in recent memory — for an FCC chair to write to a company ahead of an event, questioning whether it will comply with the rules.

In a statement, iHeart said it would respond promptly to Carr's questions. "We look forward to demonstrating to the commission how performing at the iHeartCountry Festival — or declining to do so — has no bearing on our stations' airplay, and we do not make any overt

or covert agreements about airplay with artists performing at our events," it said.

"The iHeartCountry Festival provides the same kind of promotion that we see with artists on talk shows, late-night television, the Super Bowl and in digital music performances and events: The promotional value to the artists is the event itself, and, in our case, is unrelated to our radio airplay." 



Keith Urban performs during the 2024 iHeartCountry Festival in Austin, Texas.

Amy E. Price/Getty Images

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Marketron is bullish on radio

Jimshade Chaudhari and Todd Kalman on radio's assets and the growing role of digital revenue

In its annual benchmarking report to RAB about radio digital sales, Borrell Associates found that 2024 digital sales in the United States reached the \$2 billion mark, up 10.2% from 2023, and the forecast for 2025 is \$2.3 billion.

"Digital income has doubled in the past five years and is no longer a sideline business," the authors wrote. "In 2024 the average for a radio station was \$482,470, accounting for nearly one-quarter of its annual income."

The report was sponsored by Marketron, whose CEO Jimshade Chaudhari wrote in the introduction: "As radio becomes a more mature digital sales engine, it's critical to understand the local environment and what matters to these advertisers."

Radio World asked Chaudhari and Todd Kalman, Marketron's senior vice president and head of revenue, to discuss the challenges facing radio sales departments and how Marketron fits into the picture.

Chaudhari joined Marketron in a senior executive role in 2019 and was named CEO in October of 2023. His background includes management and product roles at Sling TV, DISH Network and Sprint Nextel, now part of T-Mobile.

Kalman is senior vice president and head of revenue for Marketron, which he joined in 2015 after holding national sales roles with iHeartMedia and CBS Radio.

What's the most important technology trend or challenge for radio sales?

Jimshade Chaudhari: Many broadcasters are using a variety of technology stacks, some involving older products, which is driving inefficiency. We hear it when we talk with sales managers: "My people are spending more time in systems than they are out on the streets or selling virtually."

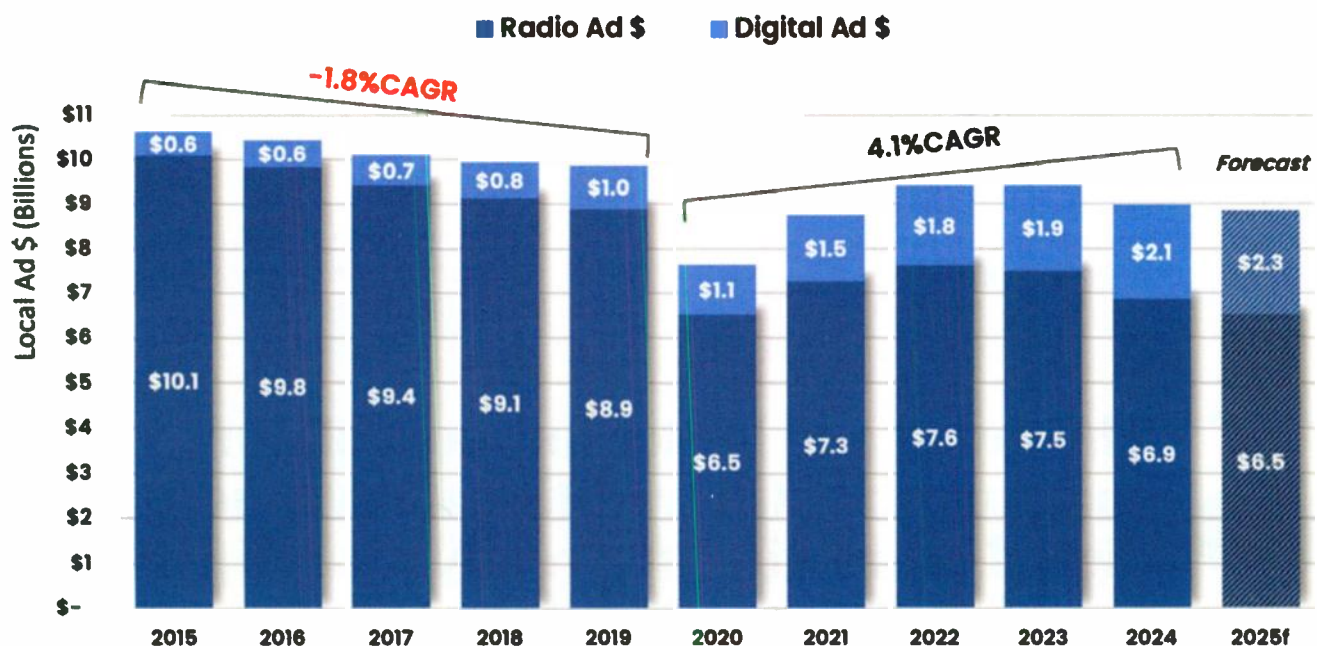
Digital is the poster child for this. When radio companies first got into selling digital, many didn't really know what they were doing, so they'd listen to a couple of vendors and kludge things together. They ended up with a digital tech stack that doesn't talk to the traditional linear tech stack supporting their core business, which is still radio advertising.

If stations don't modernize and optimize these systems, it's going to be hard for them to stay competitive. The good news is that a lot of customers are asking the right questions about this now.

Briefly summarize your company's business.

Chaudhari: Marketron is 100 percent focused on the radio industry. Our headquarters are in Haley, Idaho, with offices in several other places, and a significant remote workforce since COVID.

Below
Radio's Digital
+ Core Local
Revenue, 2015–
2025. From the
Borrell Associates
report.



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For over 50 years, radio traffic systems have been our bread and butter, with mainly back-office tools that help station teams sell their advertising, put orders in, and handle the billing and invoicing.

As our customers began to evolve and as digital became a bigger component, we built a sales enablement tool, Marketron NXT, that helps them sell both radio and digital in a simple manner, from proposal to order execution and reporting. Then we layered an embedded payments product on top of that, to make it easier for broadcasters to collect money from advertisers at a time when they are being forced to do more with less.

RW **Given its challenges, why are you optimistic about the radio business?**

Chaudhari: What we see in radio is a core set of assets that just need to evolve to stay competitive.

In the broader media landscape, radio is not big enough to attract outsiders to come in and innovate. The innovation is going to come from people with roots in radio.

We know radio has to change because of the highly competitive landscape and changing consumer behaviors; but radio also has assets. One is the local sales teams and their relationships with advertisers and small businesses in their communities. Big companies have tried to recreate those relationships or provide advertisers with self-service tools; but many local companies need the handholding, and they want somebody they trust.

Also, in many smaller markets, the newspaper might be gone, and the local radio website has filled its place. Meanwhile, radio is well-positioned to create compelling content for opportunities like podcasting.



Above
Jimshade
Chaudhari

So we're bullish on radio, we just think it has been slow to adopt technology, and there has been little innovation for the reason I described.

The big challenge is this transformation or evolution. We're seeing companies starting to take those steps, which aren't easy. But companies are changing their business models and giving up how things were done historically for the sake of a more successful future.

RW **Can you be more specific?**
Chaudhari: There has to be a mindset shift, for one.

Traditional radio is where all the dollars came from. It's high margin. And it's a product set that reps know really well and feel confident about. Now the industry has bet on digital as an alternate revenue source that will continue to grow and ideally offset the loss in radio.

The mindset must be that traditional radio advertising is just one piece in an overall advertising campaign that may involve several complementary digital tactics.

Also, from an efficiency standpoint, you can't just train people and expect your business to get more efficient. You have to modernize your tech stack.

Few broadcasters seem happy with their tech stacks right now — they might be happy with pieces of it, but they have more problems than satisfaction. Many of them reacted earlier to trends without fully realizing the implications — "We gotta do something in digital, and a vendor pitched me something. Let's go stand that up because I can use it to create a great proposal." But what happens after the proposal? "Oh, well, it has to go connect into a DSP, and the vendor doesn't do that." Now you have to find a vendor for an order management system. "Oh, that vendor will execute the

“The bread and butter for most of our customers is still traditional revenue, while digital is growing at a really nice clip. It's the combination of the two that's unique to radio.”

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Digital Report

You can read the report about digital revenue mentioned in the story at <https://tinyurl.com/rw-borrell>.



order, but they're not going to pull back any reporting." Broadcasters have cobbled systems together.



Todd, with that in mind, what are Marketron's priorities right now?

Todd Kalman: We want to bring radio companies back to Marketron. We're the only ones that are significantly investing in the space, and really the only ones with a unified traffic and digital enablement platform. We invested significantly to do that, but it's our goal to continue to modernize as more tactics and digital technology becomes available.

Digital does grow revenue for the station, but it builds upon the customer's results. A station's customers get better results when they have a unified message going over the air and on digital platforms, whether it's OTT or desktop displays, whatever it might be.



How does AI play into this conversation?

Chaudhari: It's early still in the evolution of AI. There are really cool use cases popping up everywhere

— prospecting tools, proposal tools, spec audio spots. Radio people are experimenting with AI tools as efficiency drivers to help them gather useful information before doing their customer needs analysis.

But you may have to pay \$30 a month here, \$10 a month over there, and it

all has to work together. For us, simplification is one of the hardest things to do, but the most important.

So we're experimenting with AI too. In this learning phase we're looking at how we can help people in their roles from an efficiency standpoint, and how we can build more features into our various products.



What are clients saying about the marketplace and their own pain points?

Chaudhari: In broad strokes, a lot of them are struggling with headwinds facing the industry. Because traditional radio advertising dollars aren't growing, they're being forced to cut costs.

Then with fewer people, the companies are struggling with operational efficiency, asking their staff to do more with less. How do you do that? By leveraging technology, automating things where you can, integrating different products where you can, so that you can reduce errors, or swivel chairs.


Also, our customers are confronting the transformation we talked about, getting good at selling digital. But while publicly held broadcasters are touting their growth in digital, the conversation seems to have shifted over the last six months. "I know how to grow my digital revenue," they're saying, "but I don't know how to grow digital profit."

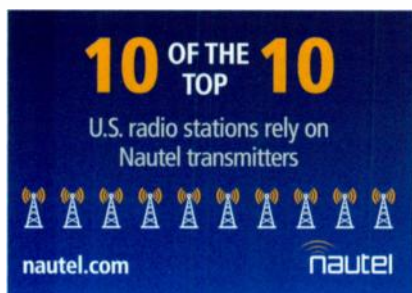
To do that you have to be executing digital in a much more efficient manner — through technology and through that mindset change.

This can all be scary for folks who have never sold digital, especially when there are so many options. Maybe today connected TV is hot, but the next day it's geofencing or streaming audio. We don't want to overwhelm them with 50 choices. We want to curate the tactics, train people in the right way, and remind them that radio is still an asset to be used with digital, rather than having digital cannibalizing radio.

The bread and butter for most of our customers is still traditional revenue, while digital is growing at a really nice clip. It's the combination of the two that's unique to radio, there's nobody else that can do that. Digital inventory just has to be more easily accessible and complementary.

Kalman: And it's not about Marketron telling the industry what it has to do. Radio knows it has to change. Companies just don't necessarily know how to do it, the procedure and steps. That's where we help. We really see ourselves as a partner. We have many people on staff whose role is to grow our customers' digital revenue. That's how they get paid — they are compensated for growing the digital revenue of customers on their lists.

Radio people have always been great sellers, they're some of the best I can think of in any industry. They can get an order, no question. The question is, can they get a renewal? You get that when you deliver what you say you're going to deliver, which is results. 



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Transmitter site is host to a time capsule

While the towers are operational, their accompanying building has long been sealed off

Heather Leah, otherwise known as the “Hidden Historian,” spends her time traversing crumbling buildings, forgotten hideaways and underground tunnels to share with followers the “hidden history right under your feet.”

WPTF(AM) is a Class B commercial station broadcasting a news/talk radio format on 680 kHz from a three-tower array. Owned by Curtis Media Group, the station serves the Research Triangle area. Its studios are in Raleigh, N.C., while its historic transmitter site sits in the suburb of Cary. Along with WBT in Charlotte, WPTF is one of two North Carolina AM stations that operates full-time at 50 kW.

“During the day, the main tower stands tall and proud,” wrote Leah in her blog post. “At night, WPTF becomes directional to protect other stations on the same frequency, utilizing two smaller towers. In the 1950s, the building was staffed around the clock, with a department of 15 people.”

Though the towers at the Cary site remain active, the accompanying building has long been abandoned, with time taking its toll. WPTF’s studios were moved off-site in 1987, according to its website.

“Adorned with rounded windows and curved edges, the building may appear small from the outside, but it extends deep underground into a shelter that provided a safe haven for announcers to broadcast through tumultuous

events such as hurricanes or even potential wars,” wrote Leah.

“Nearly 80 years old and sealed off from the outside world, it holds onto dusty secrets that time has forgotten, resembling a living time capsule,” Leah continued.

She was joined on her trip into the past by WQDR(FM) Director of Engineering Allen Sherrill and WQDR DJ Jimmy Lloyd. WQDR, formerly WPTF(FM), went on the air 75 years ago and used to broadcast from the Cary site. It remains a sister station to WPTF.

The trio wandered through a kitchen, noting decades-old McDonald’s mugs and dusty dishware and examining yellowed scripts scattered about in a small office where announcers once sat, encircled by glass.

Leah took her readers down a rickety spiral staircase into the building’s basement, which served as the entry point for radio equipment.

The basement was also home to WPTF’s disaster/bomb shelter. In cases of emergency, WPTF was prepared to maintain open lines of communication. The shelter is stocked with turntables from the 1950s and a couple of old-timey albums.

Sherill told Leah that engineers visit the Cary site regularly to inspect the equipment, but otherwise the building appears undisturbed, a time capsule for Raleigh radio history.

The Town of Cary considers the transmitter site to

be “architecturally and culturally significant,” but local government has been considering the redevelopment of the site since 2017.

“Notwithstanding the historic significance of WPTF facility, the transmitter building and towers sit on what could be prime land for redevelopment as this part of town continues to grow and as transit plans move forward that connect Raleigh and Cary more closely through a corridor near this area,” the town said in a “Cary Community Plan.”

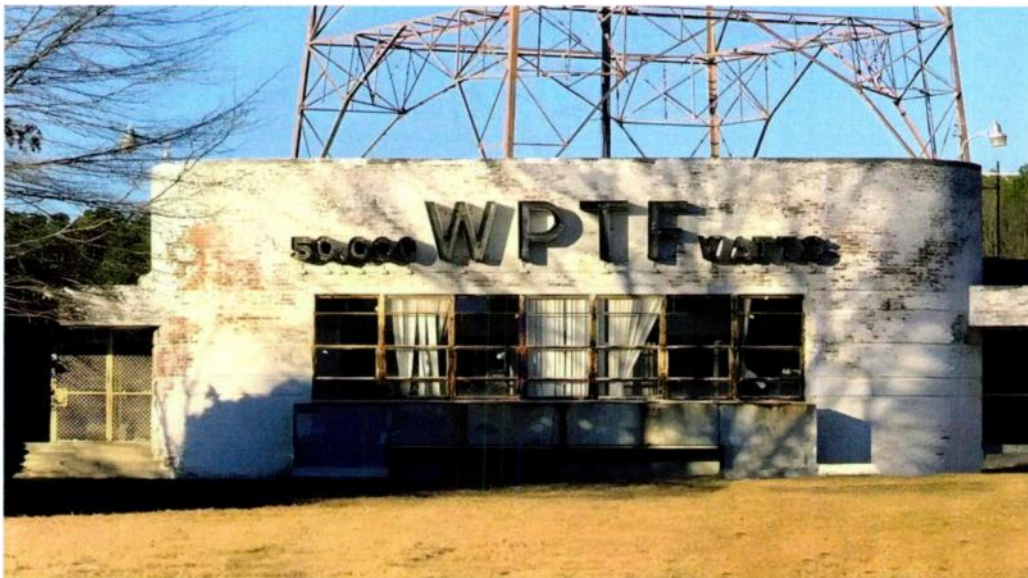
For now, the site serves as a testament to radio’s storied history.

Read her story and see the photos by scrolling down at <https://hiddenhistorian.com/adventures>. 

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Below

The outside of the abandoned building at its transmitter site in Cary, N.C. (Photo by Heather Leah)



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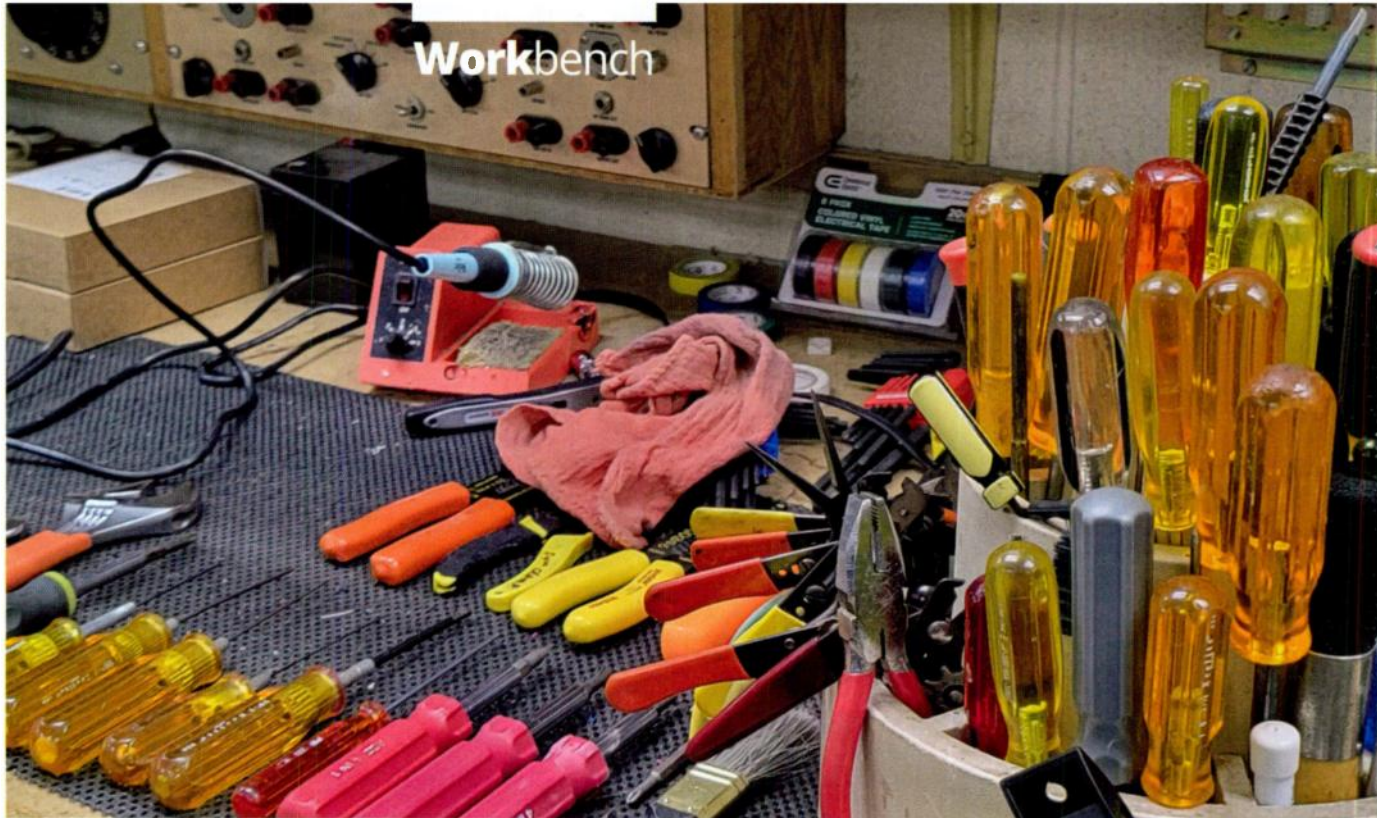
CPBE

The author is in his 34th year of writing Workbench. He handles western U.S. radio sales for the Telos Alliance and is a past recipient of the SBE's Educator of the Year Award.



Tips Please

Workbench submissions are encouraged and qualify for SBE recertification credit. Email johnpbisset@gmail.com.



Workbench

How to keep stuff on your bench from slip-slidin' away

Also, a dual thermostat that offers some inexpensive insurance

There are a lot of new people joining the engineering ranks. They are enthusiastic and eager to benefit from the hands-on experience that many Workbench readers possess.

When one of my engineering brothers and sisters mentions a helpful tip, I ask them to submit it for this column. They'll often reply, "But everyone already knows this!" That's not the case! So take a moment to share your advice with others through Workbench, the industry's favorite tips column, and earn SBE recertification credit at the same time.

Get a grip

Today we have several products that might make your job easier.

Try lining the top of your workbench with a sheet of Con-Tact Brand Premium Shelf Liner. The engineering staff of Tyler Media's KOMA(FM) in Oklahoma City uses this non-adhesive rubberized mat to prevent tools and equipment from slipping off workbench surfaces, as shown in the photo above. The matting comes in a roll and can be custom-cut for your specific need.

It's available from online retailers or direct from the company at <https://con-tactbrand.com/>. Browse the site to learn about a variety of adhesive, non-adhesive and cushioned liners suitable for various surfaces.

Bring the heat

Here is an inexpensive device that can be used as a temperature alarm or to control backup cooling fans or heating devices at a transmitter site.

Engineering consultant Frank Hertel, principal at Hertel Engineering, told us about a version of the Uxcell Mechanical Thermostat that contains two independent mechanical thermostats in one housing.

Each thermostat's switching contacts are electrically isolated. At 120 VAC the contacts are good for 15 Amps. At 220 VAC, the contacts will handle 10 Amps.

Temperature is shown in Celsius; the range of operational adjustment is 0 to 60 degrees C, which is 32 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Frank says most thermostats do not have this range of temperature, making the device suitable for the swings that conceivably could happen at transmitter sites. You could use it to trigger a backup exhaust fan should your main air conditioning fail.

Above
A Con-Tact Brand Premium shelf liner can help hold your equipment and tools in place on the workbench.



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14

Shine a light

You know what it’s like to work under a console or in the back of an equipment rack, just wishing that you had a source of bright light.

As we’ve discussed, many engineers use LED “rope” strands to brighten these areas; others rely on small battery-powered puck lights, with mixed results.

Your choices have improved thanks to development of high-intensity LEDs and improvements in battery technology. One to consider is the BLS T401 Super Bright Closet Light, which gets strong reviews. The light provides 6000K cool white light of 200 lumens and includes a motion sense mode that will turn it on when you approach.

You can attach its small mount to the wall with 3M adhesives or screws, both provided. Magnets in the light hold it in place and also allow you to detach it easily for use as a flashlight, kind of like a light saber!

BLS says the battery will last six months between charges when the light is used in the intermittent

Above
This super-bright, battery-powered light from BLS is sold for use in a closet but can also brighten a dark equipment rack. Find it at Amazon.

Amazon



Left
Use this dual thermostat to control ventilation fans. It’s available from Walmart and other major retailers.

Right
Steve Tuzeneu’s label reminds him when he last changed the batteries.


operation mode. It can be charged using a USB-C cable (not included).

Why not place one of these inside the door of your transmitter building? A pack of two costs less than \$60. Search BLS T401 Super Bright Closet Light on Amazon.

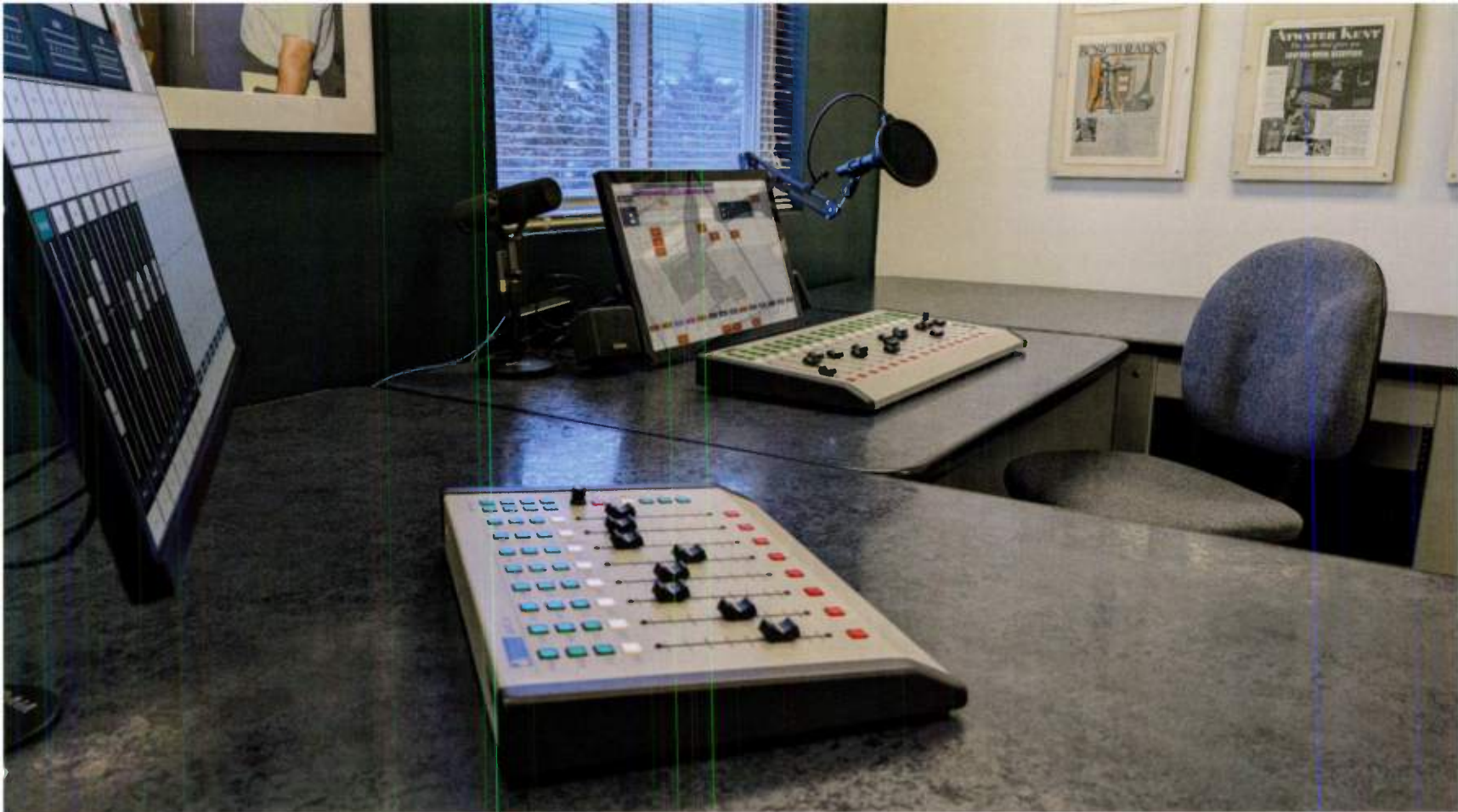
Label that thing

And Steve Tuzeneu, chief engineer for Hall Communications in Lakeland, Fla., commented on our column in February, “Not All Labels Are Judgmental.”

Steve says that he uses labels on equipment to keep track of RAM battery replacements. UPS units get similar treatment so Steve knows when next to change the batteries.

Little habits like this are part of good engineering practice. They take only a moment, yet they could save you from a catastrophe. Where do YOU like to put labels? 

“Why not place one of these inside the door of your transmitter building? A pack of two costs less than \$60.”



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Writer



Rick Sewell

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Troubleshooting an alarming situation

Why wasn't data getting to our four internet radio monitors?

A few weeks ago, I woke up to around 50 email alarms. Not exactly the way you want to start your day. All the alarms came from the Nielsen PPM Multi-Channel Encoding Monitor, or MCEM, that monitors our internet streams.

The first thing I did was to confirm whether the streams were actually down. Eventually, after figuring out that the streams actually were on, I diagnosed that the MCEM was not getting audio.

The MCEM is fed audio for each station from Inovonics 610 Internet Radio Monitors. The issue seemed to lie with these units. But it was strange that all four of these went down at the same time. It had to be something external to them.

Since I could bring up their Web GUI, I knew the network was not an issue. I began to wonder if the firewall we had installed at the end of the year might have stopped the data traffic from getting to the units. It had already been in place for a couple of months, so it didn't seem likely. Still, it was worth a check.

Reconnected

When I logged into the PfSense firewall, I did see that there was traffic being stopped to the Inovonics 610 units. I tried using the "Easy Rule" feature in PfSense, which essentially tells the firewall to stop blocking the traffic it is blocking to that IP address. This didn't fix the issue.

I then turned to Todd Dixon, the guru of PfSense here at Crawford Broadcasting. He saw the same things I was seeing, but we couldn't really see why it was stopping the URLs from getting through. Earlier, I had tried the URLs on my desktop computer on the exact same subnet and the link would bring up the streams on my computer just fine.


While Todd and I were looking at the issue, I went into the network configuration of one of the Inovonics 610s. I noted that the Internet Radio Monitor only allowed one entry for a DNS server.

In this instance, we were using the main Comcast DNS static IP address. We have been using this address for DNS for more than 10 years and on lots of computers and equipment where we used static IP addresses, and we'd really never had any issues. We often used a combination of the Comcast and Google DNS servers when it was possible to enter two or more servers.

On was a bit of a lark, I decided to change the DNS server from Comcast to Google. Within 30 seconds, the stream was once again connected to the Inovonics Internet Radio Monitor. I felt bad that I'd wasted Todd's time, but I was glad to see it working again.

As you might imagine, we might have other issues show up. One of the first things we noticed was that our NexGen timekeeping computer was off on time. The time sync software was displaying a message that it was unable to connect to the time servers. I checked the DNS entry in the network setting and sure enough, it was only the Comcast DNS server. Once changed to Google's DNS, the time sync started working again.

We also had a Burk ARC Plus Touch not sending us a notification of a generator exercising as expected, and it was also the same problem. One DNS entry was allowed and it was pointing to Comcast.

So we are going to have to check a lot of equipment to see what is still pointing to the Comcast DNS server. It would be nice if Comcast had let us know that they were making a change or having issues. 

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Writer



Marc Yablonka

These stations serve America's Hmong communities

California, Minnesota and Wisconsin have some of the country's largest concentrations of Hmong

Jan. 7, 2011 was a difficult day at Hmong-language station KJAY 1430 AM in Sacramento, Calif. The staff had just learned that after a year in the hospital, Vang Pao had passed away the day before from pneumonia and cardiac complications.

As a major general in the Royal Lao Army, Vang had led the CIA-supported fight against communist Pathet Lao forces. In 1975, after 15 years of fighting a "secret war" tangent to the combat in neighboring Vietnam, he led the exodus of his people out of Laos to freedom and safety in America, where he became a visible, beloved and sometimes controversial leader of the U.S. Hmong community.

"I was working at the station that day. The hosts were coming into the station hour after hour and going on air, as usual," said Tiffany Powell, KJAY's station manager.

"On normal days, they arrived fresh and happy. That day, the male hosts arrived exhausted, sad and not as bright and cheerful as usual. They looked like they had been awake all night long. Vang Pao's dying wasn't instantaneous. It was a sad day at the station."

Though Powell does not speak Hmong, she said, "Their words seemed heavy over the air."

No doubt the air was also heavy at other radio stations that carry Hmong-language programming, such as KBIF(AM) in Fresno, Calif., and KSRM(AM) in Minneapolis, as well in the hearts of the approximately 370,000 Hmong who call California, Wisconsin and Minnesota home today.

Wisconsin alone has three stations that carry substantial Hmong-language programming: WIXK(AM) in New Richmond, WORT(FM) in Madison and WNRB(LP) in Wausau.

In California, where approximately 107,000 Hmong reside, the origin of the state's two Hmong-language stations is a fascinating story.

"Around the mid-1990s, a Hmong gentleman came to the station and asked if he could rent some airtime to share with his community," Powell said. "That was the start of Hmong radio on KJAY."

That gentleman was TerFong Yang, who became KJAY's first Hmong announcer, and only recently hung up his KJAY headphones.

Above
KBIF Fresno's
Program Director
Moua Vang on
the air.

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Radio Programming



Above
KJAY's home page

Right
KJAY's Kao Xiong in
an undated photo.



Courtesy Tiffany Powell

He facilitated what he called "the only way we could connect to our local businesses and our community. We broadcast local and international news, especially from back home in Laos and Thailand. That was the news most Hmong wanted to hear. Radio is important to the Hmong people."

KJAY — now also heard on an FM translator at 98.1 — has been a family concern ever since the mid-1960s, when Powell's late father Jack bought the AM station. It later went through several changes in format.

"How did a small 500-watt daytime radio station keep going?" Powell asked. "Following Dad's example, we had to change with the times. Since 1965, Dad changed the format as he deemed

necessary. At some point we were a religious station. Then we were a country station," she said.

"When I was a teen, we played pop music. When my older sister was a teen, she would be tasked with going to the bus station downtown and receiving LP albums from a gentleman who had just traveled to Sacramento from Detroit. KJAY might have brought Motown to Sacramento — not sure about that, but it could be true," she added.

With 15,000 survivors of the secret war in Laos then residing in California's capital, Tiffany's father saw the need to service the Hmong, many of whom did not speak English. Sacramento then was the city with the state's second-largest Hmong

population, just behind Fresno. Today, Sacramento has just under 27,000, and Fresno has an estimated 35,000.

"I was one of the first deejays on the air on Saturday mornings at KJAY, one day a week from 5 to 6 a.m.," recalled Kao Xiong.

"In April 1995, every Hmong family in Sacramento bought a radio. Our one day on the air made every Hmong person think of the Long Tieng Lao Huaphau Radio station in Laos before 1975. Hmong voices on the air have been very important. They reflect the past when Laos was lost to communism. They refresh Hmong seniors' mindset about the way they have suffered as refugees with no permanent place to live. They also promote Hmong businesses, spread Hmong news and promote Hmong culture and education."

Today, according to its website, the station plays Hmong programming from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. each weekday. Programming also includes Russian music in the mornings and old-time radio programming overnight.

Running a Hmong-language radio station has presented a series of challenges, not the least of which was the pandemic.

"When Covid came in 2020, some hosts had to quit their show, which I completely understood. The hosts had their day jobs or business, and some people lost their jobs. Money wasn't running as freely as before," Powell said.

"We are still recovering financially from the Covid pandemic. Fortunately, our overhead costs are low. Also, being a locally owned station, we have the flexibility to pivot and adapt as necessary."

KBIF

The other California-based Hmong-language station is KBIF(AM) 900 in Fresno.

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Radio Programming

In the 1980s, owner Cascade Broadcasting started adding ethnic programming to the station's religious content. In 1994 it put Hmong programming on the schedule on weekday evenings.

Gore-Overgaard Broadcasting acquired KBIF in 1998 and continued with its format. It later moved religion to a sister station and expanded the Hmong programming to be heard all week, with Punjabi on the weekends.

"Hmong programming increased in popularity. It was like a snowballing effect," said Tony Donato, the station's general and operations manager.

The station sought to appeal to the younger generation. "We focused on Gen Xers. We played American Hmong music. The Fresno Bee [newspaper] ran a story about teen suicide in the Hmong community. They were having trouble adapting to our culture, and so we wanted to connect with the younger Hmong generation," he recalled.

He feels that announcers doing giveaways, remote broadcasts and interacting with social media have helped the audience expand.

Moua Vang began working part-time for KBIF in 1999 and in 2005 became the full-time program director.

"KBIF Radio has been the main resource to provide information that is important to the Hmong community of the Central Valley. We get out information, news and services that are available to our community," Vang said.

"We are proud to continue to provide entertainment, news and cultural programming going on 31 years, even with the competition of social media."

In 2014 Gore-Overgaard Broadcasting sold the station to what became Overgaard Broadcasting, which in turn was sold to Punjabi American Media last year. The station continues to serve the Hmong and Punjabi communities.

From the early years, KBIF produced what it thought the community liked to hear: current events, interviews with city council members, Hmong sheriff's deputies talking about crime.



Courtesy Tiffany Powell



Top

KJAY's first Hmong announcer was TerFong Yang, shown in 2023.

Above

TerFong Yang and Kao Xiong in 1995.

"Everybody knows us," Donato said. "We ask, 'Have you heard of us?' 'Oh yeah! I used to listen to you when I was a kid,' they answer. It's great to be able to see what we've done."

Donato feels that KBIF's success is its longevity. Although the station has carried advertising with familiar brands such as Toyota and Wells Fargo, "We don't use ratings. History is not a book with ratings."

KBIF has faced its challenges, said Donato, who started working at the station when he was in high school and has stayed with it for 45 years. But it has met those challenges.

"It was quite a run before we had internet access to program and get music. We had talk shows, [but] it was very hard to find Hmong music," Donato said.

"It's been a challenge finding employees to translate and write news, and to understand the broadcast industry," Donato said. "We've had to train 70 percent of the staff from the ground up over the years." Though he doesn't speak the language, he helped with production and tried to follow along. "I was in radio school at Fresno State and working at the station at the same time."

As with KJAY, the pandemic hit KBIF hard.

"We had ad campaigns for Covid that stressed, 'Wear your mask,' 'Wash your hands,' and 'The vaccines are coming,'" Donato remembered.

Being a brokered station has helped KBIF. "Advertisers sell real estate in Hmong," he said.

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Radio Programming

The station sells hour-long blocks of time to be broadcast Monday through Friday. Hosts can go out into the community to secure sponsors. They program shows not only in Hmong but in Korean, Armenian, Russian and Punjabi.

Hopes and concerns

As for the future of Hmong-language radio, Tony Donato's outlook is upbeat. He said social media, live streaming and smartphones have helped the station expand its reach. Still, he worries, "Is there going to continue to be an audience?"

Robert Yang, a retired Sacramento businessman and political consultant, said, "I am so proud when I turn on the radio and I hear a Hmong voice coming from the other end.

"I have used radio advertising for business and political clients in the past, and it was very effective at reaching listeners that do not speak or understand English well. Broadcasting in Hmong helps the community get information about services, events or businesses that they would not be able to get from traditional radio programs," he said.

"Some Hmong radio programs are strictly entertainment and it brings a sense of nostalgia. Most of the listeners are those that don't speak English well that came here from Laos. Radio broadcasting is doing a great service for these people."

About the future, says KJAY's Tiffany Powell, "We invite a plurality of voices. All are invited to join the KJAY family. We would like all sectors of the Hmong community to be represented on KJAY Radio."

Since his days in radio, the author has worked as a freelance military journalist, with articles in the U.S. military newspaper Stars and Stripes, Army Times and many others. Yablonka has written four books on the Vietnam War. He writes for the Sacramento-based Hmong Daily News and the Sentinel, magazine of the Southern California chapter of the Special Forces Association.

“I am so proud when I turn on the radio and I hear a Hmong voice coming from the other end.”

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Writer
Paul
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SiriusXM — “at the center of the zeitgeist”

The media company has opened a new studio at Wynn Las Vegas

A new SiriusXM Studio at the Wynn Las Vegas is serving music, sports and talk to listeners across North America. Singer-songwriter John Mayer hosted a live broadcast at the opening last June.

The company says putting a state-of-the-art broadcast facility in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip makes sense, “bringing listeners across the nation into the energy and excitement of our broadcasts 365 days a year.” Scott Greenstein, its president and chief content officer, described Vegas as “a city at the center of the zeitgeist, with major artists, personalities and sports superstars around every corner.”

The renovation of the Wynn studio was designed for live and recording of audio and video content from the facility.

SiriusXM personalities hosting shows from the Las Vegas studio include “Mad Dog Sports Radio” host JT the Brick; Shannon Gunz of “Ozzy’s Boneyard” and the “Octane” and “Turbo” channels; and Eddie Trunk of the “Faction Talk,” and “Hair Nation” channels.

The previous control room and network infrastructure have been replaced to support local and remote mixing and video switching capabilities.

“All of the new equipment is AES67- and 2110-capable. New circuits were installed, making the Wynn studio a node off the SiriusXM media network,” a company spokesperson told RW.

For audio, the live mixer was replaced with a 16-fader Lawo Sapphire mixer with PowerCore engine. A Midas DL32 performance mixer was added to support

Above
The new studio opens on the left into a Wynn hallway. The window to the control room is at right.

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Amazing Radio Studios 2025



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Above
A view from the control room.

Below right
Trey Anastasio of Phish, left, talks with SiriusXM Senior Director of Music Programming Ari Fink in front of "Phish Radio" branding on the video wall.

live performances in the studio. Heil PR 40 dynamic microphones and Comrex Access MultiRack IP codecs support the operation.

"Transmission back to the SiriusXM Broadcast Distribution Centers was upgraded to uncompressed 2110-30 audio over the newly installed WAN. Access to the RCS Zetta playout system is accomplished using HP t540 Zero Clients connecting to Zetta workstations running on virtual machines at our Broadcast Centers," which are in New York and Washington.

"Eight channels of Zetta 2110-30 audio is available on the mixer over the WAN for live show production. Audio recording is supported on Pro Tools and JoeCo Dante recorders for multitrack from the radio and performance mixers, as well as embedded on each of the video sources for recording. Stereo recordings are also captured in the RCS Zetta system and in Adobe Audition on the local computers."

The video switcher was changed to a Panasonic KC100 Kairos switcher and KC10C2G control surface, fed by seven Panasonic UE160 PTZ cameras.

"The cameras are all mounted from the grid on

Tecnopoint Starter Simplo descender 'elevators,' so camera heights can be adjusted between performances and interview configurations."

The video router was replaced by an Evertz NEXX 64x64 SDI system with 64x64 MADI audio for embedding and de-embedding. An Evertz Magnum

control system manages the routing and embedding.

Eight channels of Telestream Lightspeed Live Capture were installed on a pair of C2 servers for recording of the content.

Walls in the studio and control room received acoustic treatment with 2-inch fiberglass absorption under custom-printed stretched fabric across each wall. A new 17-by-10-foot videowall sits behind the main custom desk, which is fronted by a curved 4-by-2-foot video screen.

The main desk is designed to break into three sections that can be moved out of the studio to accommodate live



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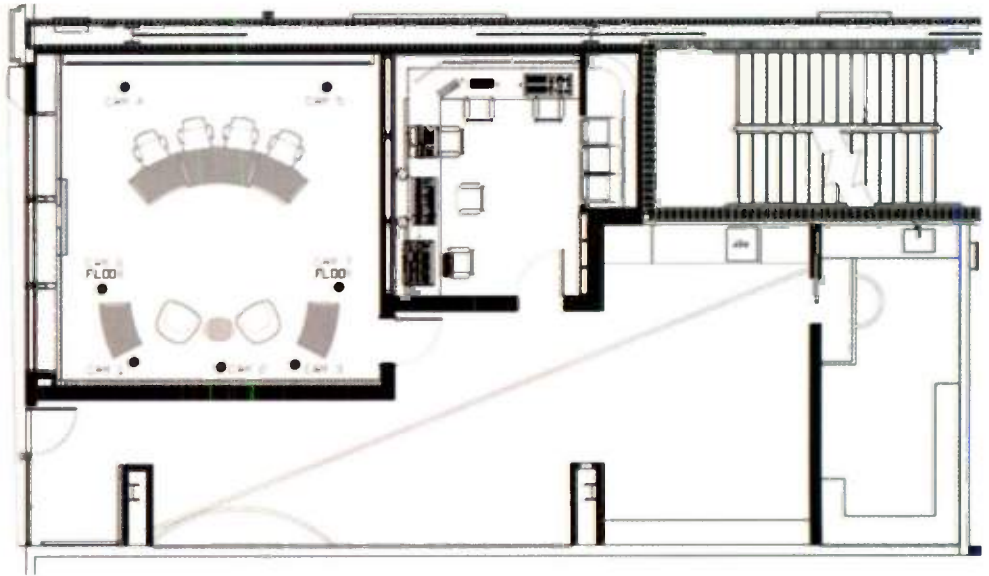
performances. New lighting was installed, and LED lighting in the scenery and desk were integrated into the lighting cues.”

SiriusXM Principal Design Engineer Thom Mohrman was responsible for engineering and aesthetic design and managed integration and commissioning. He worked with Senior Project Manager Randall Scott, Senior Network Engineer Praful Jaded and Manager of Video Acquisition, Archiving, & Publishing Keith Fisher.

Broadcast Integration Systems was hired for the project integration. Scenic design was by 3C Studios, lighting design by Feldman Designs and scenery by PRG. AV Design Services provided the video wall, while Sound Management Group handled the acoustic treatment.

This facility is also available to be leased out. Among its selling points are a 1,700-square-foot soundstage; full production staffing; customizable branding and logo on the LED wall and in-desk display; up to six mix positions for talent; and remote guest video and audio capture.

The studio can live-stream to 36 possible streaming platforms including YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and X.



Above
Floor plan.

The adjacent lobby and lounge area can accommodate 30 people.

Other SiriusXM facilities include its headquarters in Rockefeller Center in New York; a major facility in Washington, D.C.; studios in West Hollywood, featuring the performance space “The Garage”; Miami studios in South Beach; and a recently opened hub in Nashville. 

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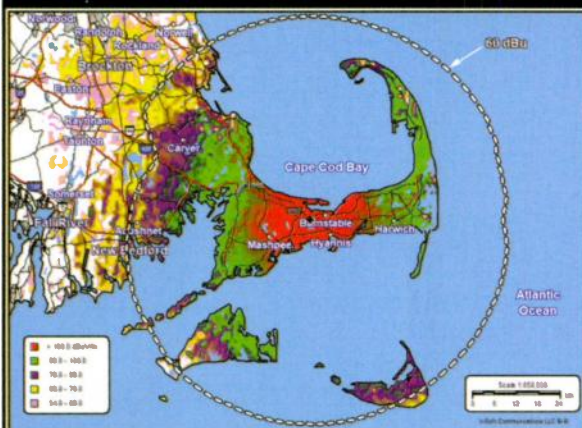
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Enhancing safety at tower sites

Essential guidelines for broadcast engineers

This article originally appeared in the February 2025 issue of The Signal, the member newsletter of the Society of Broadcast Engineers. To join the SBE or get more information, visit sbe.org.

Imagine standing at the base of a towering structure, with the infrastructure of high-powered radio and TV all around you. For broadcast engineers, this is a daily reality, where the balance between technical precision and physical safety is paramount. This guide dives into the essential safety measures that can transform these towering giants from potential hazards into safe, efficient workplaces.

Slips, Trips and Falls: Ground-Level Hazards

Picture navigating a maze of cables and equipment, where one misstep could lead to a serious injury. Slips, trips, and falls are not just common — they're a constant threat. For broadcast engineers, managing these hazards is crucial to maintaining both safety and operational efficiency. To address these risks:

- **Organize Workspaces:** Ensure cables and wires are neatly secured to avoid tripping hazards, especially during equipment upgrades or troubleshooting.
- **Maintain Clear Pathways:** Regularly inspect and clear walkways, keeping them free of debris and ensuring proper drainage to prevent pooling water.
- **Wear Appropriate Footwear:** Slip-resistant, ANSI-compliant boots are essential for navigating diverse terrains safely.

- **Inside Equipment Shelters:** Maintain a clutter-free environment with adequate lighting to reduce risks and facilitate efficient troubleshooting.

RF Energy: Invisible but Significant Risks

RF energy is an invisible danger lurking at tower sites. For broadcast engineers, the proximity to high-powered antennas means constant vigilance is required. Prolonged exposure can lead to serious health issues, making it essential to understand and mitigate these risks.

Key safety measures include:

- **Site Assessments:** Understand RF exposure levels at your location and map areas near high-powered antennas to identify zones with elevated risks.
- **Personal RF Monitoring Devices:** Equip engineers with devices that alert them to unsafe exposure levels, enabling real-time adjustments to minimize risks.
- **Collaborate With Site Operators:** Implement lockout/tagout (LOTO) procedures to reduce or shut down antenna power during critical maintenance.
- **Daily Operations:** Integrate RF safety into daily operations by aligning maintenance schedules with low-power transmission periods to minimize risks without compromising broadcasting continuity.

Falling Objects: Protecting Ground Crews

Working beneath towering structures, broadcast engineers and ground crews face the ever-present danger of falling

objects. Whether it's a dropped tool or debris, the risk is real and requires proactive measures to ensure everyone's safety. Mitigation strategies include:

- **Exclusion Zones:** Rope off areas below active work zones and communicate clearly about restricted areas during maintenance activities.
- **Tool Tethering Systems:** Secure tools used at height to prevent accidental drops, minimizing disruptions to technical workflows caused by missing or damaged equipment.
- **Head Protection:** Always wear hard hats meeting ANSI Z89.1 standards, ensuring they are inspected regularly for durability and fit. Hard hats with chin straps help keep them securely in place.
- **Effective Communication:** Maintain clear communication between ground personnel and tower teams to ensure safety and operational efficiency.

NFPA-Compliant Signage: A Safety Necessity

Signage is more than just a warning — it's a crucial safety tool. For broadcast engineers, clear and compliant signage can mean the difference between a safe site and a hazardous one. It guides non-technical personnel away from danger and helps maintain the integrity of critical systems. Key types of signage include:

- **Electrical Hazards:** Highlight high-voltage equipment zones, especially near power supplies for transmission systems.
- **RF Warnings:** Ensure RF exposure areas are clearly marked, with boundaries aligned to safe working distances.
- **Fire Hazards:** Label storage areas for flammable materials, such as fuel for backup generators, to minimize fire risks.
- **Signage Maintenance:** Ensure signage is durable, strategically placed, and regularly updated to remain effective. Integrate signage with operational plans to ensure safety without disrupting site workflows.

Emergency Preparedness: Ready for the Unexpected

In the high-stakes world of broadcasting, emergencies can strike without warning. For broadcast engineers, being prepared is not just a precaution — it's a necessity. A well-crafted emergency response plan can safeguard both lives and the vital systems that keep communications running. Key elements include:

- **First Aid Resources:** Keep first aid kits accessible and ensure team members are trained in basic first aid techniques.
- **Contact Information:** Maintain updated details for emergency services, nearby hospitals and site managers, emphasizing quick access during critical incidents.
- **Tailored Rescue Plans:** Develop response protocols for specific scenarios, such as antenna failure, RF overexposure or structural damage, with input from engineers and safety personnel.
- **Regular Drills:** Conduct regular drills to familiarize engineers and crews with emergency procedures, ensuring swift and effective action when needed.

Fostering a Culture of Safety

Creating a culture of safety is a continuous journey. For broadcast engineers, it's about more than just following protocols — it's about embedding safety into every aspect of their work. This commitment ensures not only their well-being but also the reliability and efficiency of the systems they oversee. Best practices include:

- **Ongoing Training:** Equip engineers with the latest knowledge on hazard identification, safe practices and RF safety standards.
- **Encourage Hazard Reporting:** Create a system for reporting unsafe conditions, empowering engineers to voice concerns without fear of reprisal.
- **Routine Inspections:** Regular audits help identify emerging risks and ensure compliance with safety standards.

Broadcast engineers, by integrating safety into their technical workflows, play a pivotal role in creating safer tower environments for all.

Conclusion

Whether on the ground or within equipment shelters, the risks at tower sites are ever-present. For broadcast engineers, the challenge is to balance safety with the technical demands of their role. By proactively addressing hazards and fostering a culture of vigilance, they can protect themselves, their teams and the critical infrastructure they maintain. With these guidelines, broadcast engineers can achieve both safety and operational excellence, ensuring the seamless operation of our communication networks.

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“With these guidelines, broadcast engineers can achieve both safety and operational excellence, ensuring the seamless operation of our communication networks.”

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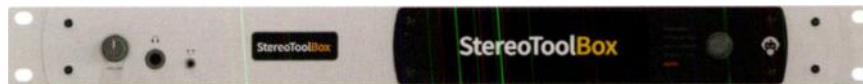


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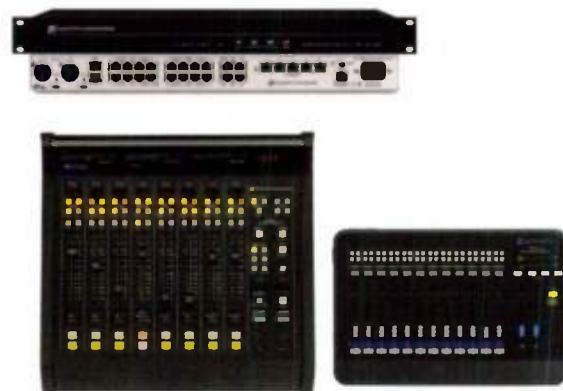


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