

Holland Cooke

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Net News (273)

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COLUMNS & FEATURES

10 QUESTIONS

news/talk/sports

10 Questions with ... Holland Cooke

essential info

**NAME:** Holland Cooke**TITLE:** News/Talk Specialist**COMPANY:** McVay Media

BORN: 12-15-50, Springfield MA (home of basketball, Dr. Seuss, Timothy Leary, and former NBA Commissioner and Democratic National Party Chairman, the late, great Larry O'Brien)

RAISED: Well, by GREAT parents, now 87, in East Longmeadow MA 01028

BRIEF CAREER SYNOPSIS:

1995-current: Consultant, specializing in News/Talk/Sports radio and Internet
 1996-2004: Captain Willis House B&B, Block Island RI, owner and Bill Murray-esque innkeeper
 1991-1994: **USA Today**, VP/Sky Radio;
 previously VP of start-up company FliteCom Systems Inc.
 1984-1991: **WTOP**/Washington, Operations Manager
 1969-1984: Various on-air and management positions in radio and television
 Last on-air job: **WBIG**/Washington, re-enacting my misspent youth as a Top-40 DJ, and horrifying Washington-area friends-and-associates who only knew me as "a suit," by doing fill-in work on an Oldies station (<http://www.hollandcooke.com/wbig.ram>).
 Last full-time on-air job: **WKBW/**Buffalo,

afternoon drive, 1982.

Best-ever on-air job: **WPRO**/Providence, 1974-1980 (<http://members.aol.com/cookeh/WPRO77.html>)

Class of 1972 1/2, Massachusetts State College, Westfield: English major, Secondary Education minor

Certified to teach in the public schools of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts the last year certifications were granted for life.

Class of 1968, East Longmeadow High School, where, in home room, I sat next to current Vermont Governor Jim Douglas

Web site: www.HollandCooke.com

Credo: "Defeat goes over defense before detail."

Epitaph: "Keep the line moving."

1. Can terrestrial radio retain younger listeners? Is the threat from new media real, and can it be countered? How?

RETAIN 'em? We'll have to ATTRACT 'em first! Young people are AM/FM's lost generation. We need to offer them something they can't get anywhere else; so it's likely that won't be music. Radio needs a new hook, on the magnitude of Sudoku. Some new trick, like Rush Limbaugh was in the late 80s. Find it and we'll still have a tough time attracting young people doing we-talk-you-listen programming to a generation weaned on menu-driven, on-demand, pick-and-choose, interactive media. At 8PM on February 9, 1964, Baby Boomers were all sitting still in front of the television, waiting for Ed Sullivan to say "THE BEATLES!" Appointment consumption is unfathomable to Boomers' kids, who think TV pauses.

SMART stations will find new media opportune; to most stations it's a threat. Recently, grown-ups lined-up for iPhones like munchkins lining-up for a Harry Potter book. Seen iPhone? It does everything BUT play AM/FM radio, but it sure is "the new transistor radio," and I sure am glad I'm not working in music radio. My client stations are exploiting iPhone a half-dozen ways.

But iPhone isn't an issue, it's a symptom (and doesn't THAT sound like a consultant?). ANY new media platform can be opportune. After all, our on-air inventory is finite; our online inventory is infinite. And we start-out with two things new-platform-only players dream of:
 a.) pre-existing cume, brand, and equity; and
 b.) we know how to sell audio content.

2. What's your take on the PPM -- good, bad, or indifferent for talk radio? Are there steps stations should be taking right now to prepare for it?

10 QUESTIONS

Home
 Top 40/M
 Top 40/R
 Hot/Modern/AC
 Country
 N/T/S
 Alternative
 Rock
 Urban/UAC
 Cont Christian
 Canada
 On The Beach

MY ALL ACCESS

Home
 My Account

INDUSTRY TOOLS

Net News
 Net Talk
 Industry Directory
 All Access Desktop
 Arbitron
 Arbs/PPM Analysis
 Stock Index

MUSIC TOOLS

Mediabase 24/7
 RateTheMusic.com
 StreetPulse
 BigChampagne
 NMC eTracks

CAREER TOOLS

Job Market
 VO/Image/Track
 Pollack Media
 All Them Big Dogs
 Research Doctor
 Consultant Tips
 Success Tips
 Life Lines

COLS & FEATURES

10 Questions
 Sales & Mgmt
 Digital Technology
 Morning Show Prep
 Promo & Marketing

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VERY good for all kinds of radio. For years, I've consulted a station in Wilmington, Delaware, where the very first PPM tests ran; so I've had a fascinating front-row seat. Everything we ever thought about diary measurement is true. You DO have "an invisible cume." Listeners DON'T remember all the stations they listen to. Diarykeepers DO round-up. The first Quarter Hour is NOT any different than the other three.

At the NAB convention in Vegas in April, I moderated RTNDA's session on PPM. My panelists were Arbitron VP Gary Marince and KYW/Philadelphia Director of News & Programming Steve Butler. Lots of what-nerds-call "granular" data. Steve showed us one single Quarter Hour on his station that consistently underperformed all others...curious on a station so strictly uniform hour-to-hour. Steve shared that "we had to add ONE commercial minute per day, and that's where we put it."

Predictably:

- a.) Most stations' cume will go up and AQH will go down;
- b.) Conventional wisdom about formats will be upended (Oldies is already regaining respect);
- c.) When the dust settles, the top diary stations will still top PPM ratings.

3. You've been giving talks at conventions about podcasting -- how to start, what to do with them, why. Well, then, why should talk radio stations and hosts be doing podcasting? What are the benefits from doing it now?

Only 4 years old, the word "podcasting" is already dated, yet many stations aren't there YET.

Radio's strength is its weakness: programming is live, so only those listening in real-time hear it. So at least archive. Also use archived and streaming audio and video for stuff-that-never-aired-but-was-PROMOTED-on-air (via what we used to call "a spot schedule," informative :60 vignettes).

Start with lawyers, for the reasons stated, and via the business model outlined, at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqQHZCSciEs>.

4. Why do some syndicated shows succeed and others fail -- what makes a good syndicated show, and what's missing from the weaker ones?

Same reasons local shows fail or succeed, topic, planning, talent.

And syndication is tough to begin with. Putting audio up-on-a-satellite is a snap. Getting-stations-to-take-it-down is the hard part. Clearance marketing fundamentally seeks to DISPLACE programming-already-in-place. After all, those hours aren't dead air status quo. So you're asking management to make a change that impacts all four departments at the station (Programming, Sales, Engineering, G&A).

And syndicated TALK programming is doubly problematic, since, at many clusters, the News/Talk AM is the red-headed stepchild. You're actually asking management to bother THINKING about that AM they want to just-go-sit-in-the-corner-and-behave. They'd rather continue to focus on music FM sisters already measurable losing the music war to new-tech.

5. There have been some heated exchanges on convention panels about whether talk shows should be going heavy on the election talk yet -- Phil Boyce has been advocating going hard with the politics since the winter, while others say it's still too early. Is it too early, a year and three months from the election, or is it time? How can you tell?

Make politics relevant and tangible to Homer and Marge Diarykeeper, and you're in business. But there continues to be a disconnect between what-people-qualified-to-have-an-Arbitron-diary-care-about and the political/public affairs/other arcane process topics many Talk hosts seem obsessed with.

Before saying "LIBERAL" or "CONSERVATIVE" on-air, ask yourself, "How will the-matter-at-hand threaten to block-the-path-of Homer and Marge?" Super-busy 40-something parents spend LOTS of listening time in-car, and are advertisers' dream couple. Every time they stop the car, they take money out of their pockets. DO THEY CARE ABOUT what you're talking about today?

6. Where should PDs be looking for the next wave of talent?

Intriguing-as-it-is to figure, theoretically, that we should sort MySpace by local Arbitron Zip Codes, then see-who-has-the-most "Friends," our best bet is still to scour WHAT'S LEFT OF radio's farm team.

7. We've just lost a women's talk network, and the liberal talk network's been in varying

stages of difficulty since it launched. What can we learn from this, if anything? Can women't talk and liberal talk work -- is the problem the concept or the execution?

Washingtonian magazine just interviewed me about rumored impending doom of [Washington Post Radio](#). Same answer. Someone WILL render content from-a-newspaper, or for-women or for-non-right-wingers. That someone won't necessarily be a broadcaster. So if radio can't get it right, someone else will, and there it'll be on iPhone and everywhere else in the Wi-Max footprint.

8. What's wrong with radio station Web sites? What should stations be providing at their Web sites that they don't right now?

You know a station "doesn't get it" when on-air promos include "LOG ON" and/or "CHECK OUT OUR WEB SITE." Memo to management: 1995 is over.

Some stations really DO get it. When I managed WTOP, fax machines were new. I'm green-with-envy for what today's generation there has at their disposal, and what they've done with it at [wtopnews.com](#).

My client WDEL has been MAKING MONEY WITH VIDEO for several years, at [wdel.com](#) and opt-in Email.

More often, a station's web site is merely a brochure about the station.

9. How should terrestrial talk radio programmers look at satellite -- is it direct competition, complimentary, or no big deal? If it's competition, what's the best way to combat it?

Several years ago, a group head was pounding-on-his-chest about OUR-stations-won't-air-syndicated-programming-that's-on-satellite-radio. Fast-forward to present day: Sean Hannity seems to have fared better than that group's stock.

I don't have satellite radio in my cars, but I do hear some XM channels on DirectTV. Most of my exposure to Sirius and XM is in rental cars, where I find it handy to be able to hear CNBC. And, because I'm only hearing it, this isn't about ogling Maria Bartiromo. I'm hearing about the market. XM lets baseball fans hear every game. Sirius has Howard Stern. It's a delivery system with more capacity than AM/FM presently has.

What's no-less-than-an-indictment is that people will pay not-to-listen-to AM/FM.

10. What's the future for talk radio -- what will talk radio be like in the next decade? How will it be delivered? Will it involve video? Or will it be pretty much the same as it is now?

Talk radio will save FM. Video? If presidential candidates are responding to YouTube questions, and stations AREN'T soliciting and providing video, radio is already late.

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