

RICK HALL PR

# FOURTH ESTATE

*A multi-part series on what every client should know about the media*

## Better know the press

*Part 7: Scott Metcalfe*

*News Director, 680News "All News Radio"*

### **WHAT FOR YOU IS NEWS, MAKES NEWS AND WHAT SPECIFICALLY IS RADIO NEWS?**

For us, at 680News, we want to cover the stories that people are talking about, or will be talking about. We don't try to categorise whether something is local, national or international. We believe all the news we carry is of interest to Toronto listeners. That includes all of the current financial stories, such as Lehman Brothers, AIG, and all of the things happening on Wall Street. Some people may say: "well, that's an American story or that's a Wall Street story," but these events affect our lives here in Toronto in so many ways. For retired people these developments affect their investments. The same can be said for people who are nearing retirement age and now have to readjust their plans. This news also has an effect on people's job security in a number of industries here in Toronto. So we focus on the stories that have an impact on people's lives, and the stories that people are talking about.

### **YOU'VE BEEN IN THE BUSINESS 30 YEARS. WHAT FOR YOU MAKES SPECIFICALLY RADIO NEWS AND HOW DOES RADIO DIFFER FROM THE OTHER MEDIA?**

One of the things we say here at 680News, is that we "nowcast". We talk about what's going on now. TV has the pictures and moving images, and needs a lot of time and equipment to edit those pictures for broadcast. Newspapers have to send reporters out to gather their information, write it up, and produce and distribute the newspaper. Radio, in contrast, is far more instantaneous. We send a reporter to a scene, or somebody calls us who lives near a propane explosion up in Downsview; they call in to us, and we put them on the air. Immediately. That's radio.

It has been, and always can be, immediate in its news coverage.

### **CAN YOU WALK ME THROUGH THE RADIO NEWS COVERAGE PROCESS IN MORE DETAIL? FOR INSTANCE, THE RECENT PROPANE EXPLOSION STORY IN TORONTO THAT 680NEWS COVERED EXTENSIVELY FOR MORE THAN A WEEK AFTER THE EVENT?**

I think TV, radio and newspapers are all different beasts, and they all have their own place in the universe doing things differently. I believe there will always be room for all of them. Newspapers are facing an evolving future because of the Internet, and television still needs to get a camera to the scene of a story to get the visuals before they can start full coverage. Radio does not need the same prep, if something happens and someone calls in, or we have a reporter on site, the coverage is instantaneous. In addition, radio is completely portable. Some of our most important listening hours are the morning and evening traffic commutes.

### **LET'S TALK A LITTLE ABOUT WHO YOUR AUDIENCE IS. WHO LISTENS TO 680NEWS?**

The BBM listener ratings are conducted four times a year, and list our cumulative audience, that is, the number of people who tuned in to the station at least once per week, at just under 1.3 million. So that means over the course of a single week, 1.3 million different people listened to programming on 680News.

I think there might have been one other AM radio station in Toronto that squeaked in at just over a million. But there is no other radio station in the country that has that large an audience.

### **IS THAT THE GREATEST REACH OF ANY MEDIA IN TORONTO?**

Could be – but the thing about newspapers is, for instance, the circulation numbers can look great, but is anyone going to look at the page your ad is on? Then you have to do the mathematical breakdown

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of pages and how many people look at that page in that section of the paper. But if you got the radio on, you're listening to the radio.

In radio, we talk about "foreground" and "background". You might have the radio on for background music, but with 680News, the spoken word is its foreground. So usually if people have our station on they're listening to what is being said.

#### **IF MY CLIENTS HAVE NEWS, WHY WOULD THEY WANT TO BE IN TOUCH WITH YOUR STATION ABOUT IT? AND ON WHAT BASIS WOULD YOU DECIDE WHETHER TO CARRY IT?**

Well, those are always judgement calls and it depends on the story and it depends on the day. There are days when we might be very interested in receiving ideas for a story. But then there are days like yesterday, where we had no time to run anything other than the three shootings in the city, plus a stabbing, and Lehman Brothers and AIG facing bankruptcy.

There will be other days that are really quiet in a news sense, and so we may look at an idea or news release, and say this is something we can do a story on. But it is interesting to note that we have clients who advertise on 680News, who find it works so well for them that they do their advertising buy for a full year at a time, not just three months.

#### **WHAT IS YOUR AUDIENCE MAKEUP?**

FM stations typically define target audiences by demographics – younger, boomers, income, whatever – whereas we do not make distinctions. We like them all – male, female, young, old, whatever; if you want to know about traffic, weather, what's the breaking news, tune in to our station.

However, to be more specific, our listener balance is close to 50/50 between the sexes, skewed slightly to males, and the 35–49 age group. We think those are the people who are out there working, they're commuting, they're in business, and they need to know everything that's going on that day, whether because of their investments, or to keep their own clients informed.

These are the sort of things you need to know on a day-to-day basis. Our audience is very active listeners; mortgage, interest rates matter to them.

#### **WHAT'S AN AVERAGE DAY AT THE STATION?**

For me as news director I'm usually in the office by 7:00, 7:30AM. But I'm usually up listening to the station before that, checking what we have, and listening to the other stations and following other media to see what the big stories of the day are, and how the news day is unfolding.

By time I get to the office, there are hundreds of emails to plow through, and I single out the important ones, discarding the rest. We then have a meeting with the morning show team, who get in around 3:00AM, with the anchors on air from 5:30–9:00AM.

News, and how to cover it, is full of nuances, there's always changes, and if something happens we talk about it: what did we learn from this experience, how to approach the topic the next time. We plan ahead for the coming weeks.

There's just a lot of planning. We have dozens and dozens of people who work here, and at different levels of experience.

#### **HOW DO YOU GET YOUR BUSINESS STORY IDEAS?**

We get them from any number of sources. There might be a news release. There might be a story in the paper. There might be a friend who says; "Hey, did you know this company does that?" It's one of the things we really enjoy doing, especially when we can generate stories from ordinary real life experiences.

One example is that of bringing your own wine to Toronto restaurants. We had a reporter here at the station who was originally from Montreal. One day he was at an event and the city mayor was there. He asked the mayor why you couldn't bring your own wine to restaurants in Toronto. The mayor said "well, we've looked at it in the past and to be honest with you I'm not opposed to it. If the provincial government came to us said they to us that they thought it was a good idea and we worked together with them. I'd be fine with having that happen."

This reporter tucked that tape away and shortly afterwards, a week or two later, he was at an event with the provincial minister in charge of the LCBO and liquor licensing. The reporter said to the minister "I was talking to the mayor and he was O.K. with this idea. What do you think?" The minister said:

"if the mayor is O.K. with that, so am I. I think we can make this happen".

The reporter put those two pieces together, put the story on the radio and ran it on a Saturday. On Monday it was on the front page of the newspapers, and it later became law. You wonder where story ideas come from? They can come from anywhere. They can come from somebody just asking, "Why is that?"

#### **BUT IMMEDIACY REMAINS ALWAYS REMAINS CRUCIAL?**

All media have deadlines. Newspapers have deadlines, so does TV, they're all usually pretty tight but radio is the tightest. If we want somebody it's usually right now and if the person we invite can't do it now, we move on. We'll find somebody who can do it in the next few minutes. So that's one of the key things with radio.

#### **WHAT DO YOU SEE AS NEXT FOR RADIO?**

A lot of people are thinking about where the media is headed. The Internet is having a dramatic effect, especially with newspapers. But even with TV, there have been big changes; at one time there were no all news channels. Now we have CNN, CTV Newsnet, and CBC Newsworld, CP24. There's just a proliferation of information sources. I think the one advantage radio enjoys is that it's portable and you can do other things while you're listening to the radio. You can have it on in your car, you can have it on at the cottage dock, you can have it on in your boat, you can be running, jogging, and have it in your earphones.

#### **AND YOU CAN HEAR IT INTERNATIONALLY, WORLD WIDE THROUGH THE INTERNET.**

That's right. So it's completely portable. It's nowcasting. It's what's happening now, at least at 680News that's what we do. The other media can't do that. You can't do that with the newspaper or TV but they offer something different. I still think people like a newspaper to read. Sure you can get the information on the Internet but you can't sit on the end of the cottage

dock on a sunny day, with a cup of coffee and have your laptop there. Who wants to do that? You want to have that newspaper. You can set it down and pick it up again later. So I think there are all kinds of advantages, but because of the Internet, the game has really changed.

I don't know if anybody sees clearly exactly how the media is going to change next but I think there's still room for everybody. The media pie, and desire for information, just keeps getting bigger.

#### **ANY FINAL WORDS ABOUT HOW NEWS SOURCES SHOULD WORK WITH 680NEWS?**

I like to deal with people who are straightforward. Don't try to trick the media into doing a story, don't try to do an end-run, or put lipstick on a pig.

But the media is all about ideas, and if somebody's got a good idea, that they think other people should hear about, we want to hear it. If we air the story, and the publicity helps their business, great. But at the base of it, the kernel of it, has to be a good idea or story that people in Toronto should know about. As long as you have that and you believe in it, bring it forward to us and feel very comfortable and confident in presenting it. "Here's a great idea. Yes, it supports our business, but it's still a great idea that we think you will want to tell the people of Toronto about."



**SCOTT METCALFE** a familiar name to radio news listeners in Toronto for almost two decades, is the News Director of 680 ALL NEWS RADIO, the radio station with the largest daily audience in Canada's largest media market. After graduating from the fledgling Fanshawe College radio broadcast journalism program in London, Ont., back in the '70's, Scott began his broadcast career in Moose Jaw, Sask., then moved on to Edmonton's CHED, which was the Number 1 station in Alberta back in the late '70's. He then headed up the news team at a country station in London, Ontario, before moving to Toronto in the early 80's to a station called CJCL. He has been News Director with 680News since 2003.



Effective media relations, in public, private and non-for-profit sectors, is critical. Success depends on it. Without exception. And key to effective media relations is understanding the media – print and broadcast. In a series of web postings on [www.rickhallpr.com](http://www.rickhallpr.com), direct feedback from today's important writers and editors will be featured, offering clients a rare window into the world of journalism, what works and what doesn't in media relations. The better a client knows the media, the more effective media relations will be.

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