

# ENGLISH-LANGUAGE **ARTS** NETWORK

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Thursday 21 January 2010.

Chairman von Finckenstein and Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Commission on this important topic. Our presentation is complimentary to the submission by ELAN, the English Language Arts Network of Quebec, in response to the request for hearings on community and campus radio, CRTC 2009-418.

## **Introduction**

My name is Guy Rodgers, Executive Director of ELAN, and I am accompanied by my colleague Hugh Maynard, President of Qu'anglo Communications & Consulting, who has previously worked with the Quebec Association of Anglophone Community Radio in the area of information and communications technologies for community and rural development.

Together, we will present some ideas and proposals for the CRTC to consider that will, we believe, contribute to the development of community and campus radio and the English-speaking community as well. These proposals are made within the context of the key CRTC finding that community and campus radio stations and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation play a most important role in official-language minority communities, and that community reflection in the programming of the services available in the Canadian broadcasting system can be improved.

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### **Communications are important**

Repeatedly, surveys and studies of the English-speaking communities in Quebec show that information and communications in English is one of its top priorities<sup>1</sup>. Although anglophones in Quebec are more bilingual than in the past<sup>2</sup>, there is a cultural and informational preference to receive and process information in one's own first language. There is, certainly, an abundance of English language material and media available to English-speakers in Quebec, but there is a relative dearth when it comes to material "produit chez nous": CNN may be pervasive, but it doesn't do much reporting from Gaspé or Trois-Rivieres, or even Montreal.

Thus there is a need to ensure the production and delivery of English language information and artistic and cultural material that is vital to the everyday lives of English-speaking Quebecers, a need that is not being adequately met. With the demise of print media, and the concentration in the commercial radio and television sectors, the situation is not about to improve without concerted effort, including the CRT .

### **Community and campus radio - give it room to breath**

Community and campus radio has been viewed in the past as the "poor cousin" of the various media that serve local communities, almost a media service of last resort. Community and campus radio have not fared well in comparison to commercial radio or (until recently) weekly newspapers. We would like to see that change because community and campus radio still have unfulfilled potential. They are locally run, easily accessible, affordable and adapted to a wide range of information, artistic and cultural programming. In the face of media concentration and decline in service to local communities, community and campus radio are more important than ever. But because it serves audiences and markets that are not as profitable as the mass markets, changes need to be made to assist and facilitate further development.

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<sup>1</sup> Missisquoi Institute, 2000; CROP, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Stats Can, 2006 Census data.

### **Why not just the Internet?**

Internet radio can do as much, maybe even more, than community and campus radio, why not just move on to the newer technology? Perhaps one day this will be possible, but in the meantime – a period which may be decades rather than just years – there are some serious deficiencies in an Internet-only approach to community broadcasting:

- Too many people, particularly in rural areas, do not have access to affordable and adequate broadband Internet; despite continual promises from telecommunications companies and governments, the “last mile” is still very much a factor for some.
- The promise of wi-max (and other new distribution mechanisms) looks to be, in its nascent stages, no different than land-based broadband Internet delivery – it will be installed where capital investments can be paid back, and areas with little market potential will only get the new technologies – sometime in the far future.
- Not everyone has the budget or technological prowess to set up wireless audio distribution throughout a household, let alone have a computer in the house and the workshop, not to speak of the automobile equipped with computerized audio receiving equipment and a data card.

While multi-media delivery via the Internet is a reality for those connected to fibre-optic networks in a head office, and for those with the desire to spend significant sums on new technologies, the vast majority still access their audio communications via radio. And we believe they will do so for some time to come because radio has a unique attribute – it is widely accessible, easy to use and the listener can do other things at the same time, whereas the print and visual media require dedicated attention to that activity.

### **Micro Community Radio**

#### **Complementarity over convergence**

The much touted ‘convergence’ of different media has not fared well despite numerous attempts since the emergence of the digital age. On the other hand, as newspapers have

discovered, complementarity has worked quite nicely – a print publication supplemented by a web site, for example. A complementary approach to broadcast programming using community and campus radio and the Internet offers some interesting and cost-effective potential for the small and niche markets that community and campus radio typically serve. Rather than just being ‘a radio station’, or ‘an Internet radio site’, community and campus radio stations can effectively use the Internet to link communities together, as well as to allow for the presence of a local radio outlet where a full-fledged community radio station does not have the critical mass to survive.

This concept we have dubbed “micro” community radio stations, where low-power FM stations are linked to other larger community radio stations, and between each other, using the Internet and digital technologies. In some communities with the necessary critical mass and resources, a micro community radio station would operate on a daily basis as any low-power station would do. But the connection with the Internet would allow each micro station to tailor its programming to its audience and its resources; thus, in some locales, the micro station may just broadcast news and local events for an hour each morning and evening, with the remainder of the day re-broadcasting the signal from one or more other micro or regular community radio stations, a switching mechanism managed by computer software freely downloadable from the Internet. Or the communities running the micro station may decide that they will re-broadcast regular programming on a daily basis and only use the local broadcast capability for special events such as a festival, a ceremony of note or performances of local artists. There are many possible variations on these themes but the main point is that the combination of community radio and Internet will allow local communities affordable and easily operated access to meaningful programming and content in their own language.

For your further information, we are attaching action research studies on this concept that have been recently carried out to demonstrate its functionality and viability as a community broadcast resource.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Assessment of Micro Community Radio Stations*, Department of Canadian Heritage, February 2006; and

Our vision is to create a network of micro community radio stations serving local English-speaking communities across the province of Quebec. These would be anchored in the facilities of local institutions, connected to the existing regular community radio stations for programming and technical support, and supplemented with programming contributions from other micro radio stations – a live feed via the Internet of a fiddle contest in the Gaspé would have much appeal along the Lower North Shore, as would an Indie band concert from Montreal – and other sources such as the CBC, a subject we shall return to in a minute.

Our challenge is how to get it done, and this is where we need the collaboration of the CRTC.

### **Regulatory amendments**

First and foremost, we would recommend that the CRTC amend the provisions related to developmental licenses for community radio stations, removing the three year limit currently in place. In addition, provisions need to be put in place to facilitate the creation and operation of permanent low-power FM stations so that they can become micro community radio stations. Suggestions on how this might be accomplished are also contained in the action research study, and the recent adoption by the US Senate of amendments to low-power FM radio station regulations that will remove a number of restrictions on their licensing and ability to operate following FCC recommendations may also prove a useful reference in this regard<sup>4</sup>.

Secondly, as we pointed out in our submission responding to the specific questions posed by the CRTC in preparation for these hearings, there are a number of general items that the CRTC could address in fostering and facilitating the development of the community and campus radio sector. These are, amongst others:

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*Micro Radio Station Network: Enhancing Community Communications in OLMC*, Quebec Association for Anglophone Community Radio (QAACR), March 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Local Community Radio Act of 2009, HR 1147*, that will remove a number of restrictions on their licensing and ability to operate based on the recommendations of the FCC,

### **Reserved Spectrum**

We believe that some spectrum should be reserved to ensure that a minimum number of community and campus broadcasters can survive into the future, and spectrum is not simply auctioned to the highest bidder. In addition, we believe that the CRTC should ensure that minimal spectrum space is reserved for OLMC radio stations, and they have the resources to take advantage of “new media” distribution options – which would allow for the emergence of the micro community radio station network.

### **Regulatory Burden**

To complement the improved access to spectrum, we also believe that redesigning and lessening the regulatory and reporting burden for community and campus stations will assist in creating ‘new space’ for these important community institutions to flourish. Again, this is particularly important for micro community radio stations.

### **Funding**

Increased funding is a necessity for community and campus radio to reach its full potential through capital purchases, better training, a larger market for local and other talent, reduced over-reliance on stressed volunteer labour by hiring needed services such as accounting, engineering, and audience measurement and, finally allowing community and campus radio staff such amenities as a decent salary. In our submission, we have made a number of recommendations as to how that funding may be acquired, including provisions for community and campus radio stations, in particular those from OLMC, to receive allotments from the Canadian Content Development (CCD) funds and from radio license renewal fees to be distributed via the Community Radio Fund of Canada.

### **The Last Mile**

Aside from the general benefits that would accrue from universal and affordable broadband internet access for rural and remote communities, it will be particularly important for the further development of community and campus radio, especially the micro community radio network. While the CRTC has already declared the urgency of

adopting and implementing cost effective technologies in official-language minority communities in remote rural areas to ensure access to broadband Internet in the short term, we would urge the CRTC to take action within its powers to make this a reality as quickly as possible.

### **CBC**

Lastly, we wish to remind the Commission that the CBC not only provides an important radio service to the OLMCs in Quebec, it could potentially be a significant supporter of and contributor to community and campus radio. For many anglophones, the CBC is their “local” radio service, but for some it is not accessible at all: the entire Outaouais region receives its English CBC radio signal from Ontario, and there are ‘black holes’ across the province of Quebec where English language CBC cannot be received by communities at all. An on-going issue for more than 30 years, the CBC is no closer to being able to address the question of coverage because its ability to fulfill its mandate to the English-speaking communities of Quebec has declined with its funding. The CBC could, in part, address these coverage issues while at the same time enhancing local content and programming by working in collaboration with community and campus radio. Discussions in this regard with the CBC have been very positive, particularly with the added coverage potential that would be afforded through a network of micro community radio stations. Therefore, we recommend that the national broadcaster should be sufficiently funded to enable it to work in collaboration with the OLMC in fulfilling its programming and coverage obligations.

### **Conclusion**

We would reiterate the CRTC’s pronouncement that community and campus radio stations and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation play a most important role in official-language minority communities, and that community reflection in the programming of the services available in the Canadian broadcasting system can be improved. We would also reiterate the fact that ELAN and other English-speaking organizations and their communities agree whole-heartedly with this position and we look forward to working with the CRTC to realize the ambition inherent in its wording.

We believe we have not only raised some important issues with regards to the further development of community and campus radio, but have also put forward some concrete suggestions as to how these issues may be addressed by the CRTC. We believe that these recommendations for action will have a positive impact on the further development of community and campus radio and we would indicate our willingness to continue to work in collaboration with the CRTC to find efficient yet effective ways to ensure their implementation for the benefit of the OLMC of Quebec.

We would like to thank you in advance for your consideration of these recommendations, for the time today to be able to present before you, and we can, at this time, respond to any questions that you may have.

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