



**NCRA Idea Thursdays - 11 December 2014 - Dave Del Rizzo
Live Radio on Stage - Engage your Community**

This week, a bit of a departure. I'm going to describe something that we did as a group last year which resulted in rewards more valuable than funds - exposure and engagement within our community... and, well, it helped to bring some funds in too. Technically it all started with an idea, so it made the cut for our 3rd of 4 idea Thursdays.

In late February of 2014, after a few months of preparation, rehearsals and some amazing organization, Peach City Radio mounted a live radio melodrama on the Shatford Centre Auditorium stage in Penticton. "The Big Broadcast of 2014" was an homage to an historical event that took place on the very same stage in March of 1936. At that time, a local service club staged a talent show modelled after the radio variety shows of the era. It included 110 singers, actors and dancers from the community at large, and it happened nearly 12 years prior to the establishment of radio in Penticton. Newspaper reviews at the time stated that the show had all the key attributes of a live radio show, despite not being broadcast or recorded. Proceeds from the event were eventually used to construct Penticton's Gyro Bandshell as a venue for local musical performances - this bandshell is still used extensively for outdoor performances today.

The opportunity to draw parallels to our present-day situation were many, and we took advantage of as many of them as we could. With an original script highlighting the history of the area - including songs - written by our own Craig Henderson, Peach City Radio assembled a cast of 37 community members, along with 9 crew, and mounted 3 performances over a weekend in late February 2014. Community involvement was the key as our cast and crew were drawn from a wide swath of our community, providing us the opportunity to establish the context of grand community outreach for this project. The benefit was having the chance to educate and inform the over 550 people in attendance about Peach City Radio and our plans to bring FM community radio to Penticton. This ultimately afforded our organization some very much needed exposure to a diverse demographic within our community: seniors who loved reminiscing about the "golden era of radio;" young people who marveled at seeing something fresh and innovative; local politicians, service club members and business owners who all enjoyed learning about our region. Everything old is new again!

Advanced promotion about the show was read and listened to across our province. CBC Radio-1's weekend morning show aired a province-wide interview complete with audio snippets of a song and sound effects. Shaw TV aired a video across the Okanagan region about the show, and within our local market there were newspapers stories and online articles. We also put our technical skills to use by recording the show, and have since made it available for download on our website - we are still getting asked constantly about when we'll do it all again.

Staging a radio show is much easier than live theatre. We set up 4 microphones at the front of the stage, and a foley table with a couple of mics as well. Actors held their scripts, and read in character, approaching the mic only during their speaking parts. Our creative foley technicians made amazing sounds out of everyday items, such as glasses, tin boxes, brushes, whistles, and various other noise makers. The foley table was on full display to the audience, breaking that traditional radio/audience barrier, and the crowd ate it up. The audience was even encouraged to participate, being prompted by our cue card holder, asking them to 'Booooooo' or cheer at appropriate times. Local musicians filled in the gaps in between sketches with original songs to entertain the crowd. Think of 'A Prairie Home Companion' or 'Vinyl Cafe' meets the traditional 'War of the Worlds' type broadcast if you're still having trouble with the visualization.

Yes, we also certainly raised some funds, thanks to the kind donations of a few individuals and businesses, as well as to the audience members who bought tickets to the show. The production value was great, minimal and inexpensive at the same time, and we relied heavily on the amazing volunteers that worked to pull it all together in fairly short order. However, what this project really provided for us was a way to engage a relatively large number of people within our community that we had perhaps not yet reached, in a way that was very pleasing to them.

If you or your station is interested in staging something like this, we'd be glad to field any questions you may have, and look forward to hearing about your projects!