

Comment

CBC radio station for Hamilton is overdue

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Here is a little media quiz for everyone: Of the following three cities shortlisted for a CBC Radio station (London, Hamilton, Kitchener), which one did not get one?

If you answered Hamilton, you rise to the head of the media class.

As odd as it seems, it is true: Hamilton has never had a CBC Radio station. Paul Wilson wrote about it way back in 2002. After that, an eye-opening report, entitled "The CBC and Hamilton," was published in the "Raise the Hammer" blog (accessible in the March 2005 archives).

Why does this matter and why should you care? Well, for one, the CBC is our national public broadcaster and has a mandate (revised 1992) outlined in the Broadcasting Act requiring the CBC to "reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences while serving the special needs of those regions."

Clearly our (local) needs are not being served.

Another reason we need our own CBC radio station? These days, in the era of "fake news," factoids, information of dubious pedigree, alternative facts and outright lies, it is crucial to our democracy to have more credible sources of information.

CBC Radio would add to our choices. Quality local news and information supports us in making better decisions — a keystone of any healthy democracy.

The CBC can offer in-depth, insightful, well-researched interviews, features, documentaries, town hall meetings, etc.

With no commercial ads, they are

also free of any pressure from private owners and advertisers.

CBC has never had much presence in Hamilton, but in the mid 2000s, CBC recommitted itself to local programming and, in 2013, CBC proudly announced their "digital experiment" for Hamilton. It was unclear what form that would take, but it was not a radio service.

To their credit, reporters investigating and uploading local stories to the CBC Hamilton website (the digital experiment), gave Hamilton a higher profile on the national scene, even winning journalism awards.

However, a text-based site, with some audio and video clips is not, and never will be, a good substitute for a live, daily radio program with its own local host featuring local guest interviews.

To be sure, several academic studies said the exact same thing — Hamiltonians were dissatisfied with a stripped-down CBC presence.

So, why has CBC not established a radio service in Hamilton in the past? Two reasons keep cropping up. One is that CBC "covers" Hamilton.

Technically, the Toronto Radio One signal (99.1) does reach us (poorly in some places). But to say Toronto "covers" Hamilton is a real stretch — especially when the station's slogan a few years ago was "Totally Toronto!"

The second, and more technical, reason is that there is no available space on the FM band for a Hamilton station. It was the same in 2005, and although there were FM frequencies up for sale in the past 13 years, CBC chose not to do so — leaving Hamilton in the "cone of radio silence" once again.

However, in this day of digital technology (and CBC's historical appetite for technological experimentation and innovation), several viable solutions are at hand.

With a digital signal on the net, you could receive CBC Hamilton at home on your computer, laptop, tablet and even on coaxial cable or satellite. In your car? Satellite or smartphone.

Another option for vehicles is HD radio (hybrid digital). Most vehicles built from 2015 onwards now have HD radio capabilities. With all these delivery methods likely reaching over 90 per cent of the population, why would CBC not move ahead instead of waiting for that elusive FM frequency to become available?

It's time, like Kitchener in 2013, that we get our own radio service that will have "strong local news and compelling radio current affairs" to quote a promotional blurb when it is launched.

Time to end the incomprehensible inequity in the distribution of broadcast resources and finally, after many years, bring Hamilton into the fold with its own radio service.

The new president of the CBC, Catherine Tait, was quoted (on CBC radio) saying, "Nothing is more important than local programming." We agree. Now let's move ahead, please.

For more detail and to follow the campaign, check out the website www.cbc.ca/radio/hamilton and us on Facebook.

Grant Ranalli is a recently retired school teacher who has a long-standing passion for quality (electronic or print.) journalism.

Web site: [cbc.ca/radio/hamilton](http://www.cbc.ca/radio/hamilton)