

MANAGER'S DESK FOR THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2020

WELCOME TO THE MANAGER'S DESK, I'M MIKE CORNELL.

DURING ALL OF THE ELECTION DAY NEWS, A VERY IMPORTANT MILESTONE FOR RADIO OCCURRED; THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF COMMERCIAL RADIO. FROM THE WEBSITE OF PBS.ORG, I FOUND THIS BACKGROUND HISTORY OF RADIO'S DEVELOPMENT.

On Christmas Eve, 1906, wireless operators on ships off the New England coast wondered if they'd had a religious experience. Out of the midst of Morse code dots and dashes beeping through their headsets came the sound of a voice reading the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke and a violin playing "Silent Night." The voice wished them a merry Christmas, and then the dots and dashes started up again.

The voice was that of Reginald Fessenden (1866-1932), an inventor and engineer who had been working on producing voice radio since [Marconi's first wireless broadcast across the Atlantic](#). After his Christmas experiment, Fessenden continued working to make voice radio practical.

For 15 years or so, voice radio was the purview of engineers and hobbyists called hams. To most people it seemed amusing, but a novelty that would have no practical application. One obstacle to radio's acceptance was that the equipment was cumbersome and required a fair amount of knowledge and attention. After World War I, Radio companies formed to build and sell ready-made machines.

In 1920, Westinghouse, one of the leading radio manufacturers, had an idea for selling more radios: It would offer programming. Radio began as a one-to-one method of communication, so this was a novel idea. Dr. Frank Conrad was a Pittsburgh area ham operator with lots of connections. He frequently played records over the airwaves for the benefit of his friends. This was just the sort of thing Westinghouse had in mind, and it asked Conrad to help set up a regularly transmitting station in Pittsburgh. On November 2, 1920, station KDKA made the nation's first commercial broadcast. They chose that date because it was election day, and the power of radio was proven when people could hear the results of the Harding-Cox presidential race before they read about it in the newspaper.

KDKA was a huge hit, inspiring other companies to take up broadcasting. In four years there were 600 commercial stations around the country.

TODAY THERE ARE MORE THAN 15,000 STATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY ALONE.

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THANK YOU FOR JOINING ME FOR THE MANAGER'S DESK, I'M MIKE CORNELL.