

# NEWS WHILE IT'S NEWS: IT CAN BE DONE WITH TV

## HERE'S HOW WKY-TV PUTS IMMEDIACY INTO ITS NEWS COVERAGE

*TELEVISION doesn't have to take a back seat to any other medium in delivering news—text and pictures—while it is still hot and with tv's inimitable impact, John Fields, news director, WKY-TV Oklahoma City, told the NARTB Region 6 conference last month. The WKY-TV story makes a good how-to-do-it blueprint for other tv news departments.*

I FEEL that television is today, and will be even more so tomorrow, the greatest communications medium ever imagined. I further feel that the presentation of television news and special events is one of the more neglected phases of concentration on the local level. This neglect, I feel, is caused by a lack of imagination, aggressiveness, and confidence. These convictions are not ones based on academic conclusions—but rather on the successful experiences of the WKY-TV news bureau.

Four years ago our news bureau was like many—reasonably well-equipped to handle a radio schedule of seven newscasts a day. That schedule was serviced by four men—all of them good newsmen—all qualified to report, write and deliver news. Our headquarters was a room approximately 10 x 14 feet, containing three desks. Our news sources were radio and news wires of United Press and Associated Press, and the usual system of personal and telephone news beats.

At that time, in 1951, we scheduled 10 television newscasts a week. Our facilities to service those two 10-minute programs a day included one 16 mm Bolex camera, the talents of one newsman to operate that camera, the part-time services of a station commercial photographer and the sometime availability of another 16 mm camera from the commercial department.

Fortunately, at this point, there was some soul-searching, an evaluation of what we could offer in television news. At the time it seemed that the immediacy of radio would never be ours in television. That problem confronts many news media. The weekly news publications solved it with comprehensiveness and graphic presentations that the speedier media cannot offer. Perhaps this was the answer. Tell the television news audience the immediate happenings and ex-

plot television's video with graphic illustrations. It was a problem that defied a qualified answer at that time. I have heard many journalists in the radio and television field state unequivocally that television news could never compete with radio, or even newspapers. I used to respect those people.

At about this time we purchased a 35 mm still camera. We thought its slide quality superior to Polaroid products. Since negative slides could be processed within five minutes, we felt it offered something of an answer to our immediacy problem. We put it to use—and with rather startling results. After having covered numerous spot stories within 30 minutes of air-time, and getting them on the show, sometimes with on-the-scene taped backgrounds, we heard comment. "How do you boys get those pictures so fast?" Or, "That was sure fast work last night." People were talking about it.

If it was *anything* in particular, it was this response to the effects of a \$90 piece of equipment that crystallized the thinking of those of us in the news bureau. Give the people news, as only television news can, and give it while it is still news.

We knew what had to be done, and we started the job. We were encouraged by the public, and management, every step of the way. Sometimes slowly, sometimes faster than we hoped, we added to and improved our facilities. Today, instead of four men we have 11 and one woman. Everyone in the department, with the exception of the woman, can use a silent or sound camera. Everyone in the department, with the exception of three, can deliver news behind a camera or microphone. Six people can operate the Houston-Fearless high-speed film developer.



MR. FIELDS

Today, instead of 10 newscasts a week we have 28. Instead of five weather programs a week we now have 28. Instead of a mere weather hobbyist to present those programs, we now have the services of two professional members of the American Meteorological Society.

Our newsroom of four years ago was quickly outgrown. Our headquarters now is almost exactly twice as large. A large triangular news desk seating six men would take up almost all of our former home. We now number among our facilities: six 16 mm silent cameras; two sound-on-film Auricons, both modified for portability; more than three lenses for each camera unit; light meters for each unit; two portable light units and several bar-lights; a complete dark-room and processor; a specially constructed editing table where two men can work; two radio-equipped panel trucks; four telephone trucks and one straight line; four recorders; three news teletypes from two services; three weather teletypes; a complete film library, cross-indexed, that is consistently current.

You may have concluded that our emphasis is strictly regional. We have found that such concentrated coverage provokes the most and best response. Over a year ago, we tired of attempting to present national film before it became history. We found telephoto and facsimile still-pictures dull, uninteresting and cumbersome to present. We concentrated our efforts where we could get our hands and teeth into the news.

To help us, we set up a correspondent system. We have 44 in Oklahoma—in every part of the state. We have regional men in three surrounding states. We pay a correspondent a stipulated amount for each foot of his film we use, replace his film, and reimburse him for mileage and expenses.

Each film received from a correspondent is constructively criticized. We hold a day-long seminar each year and send mimeographed material in between. A cash award is made each month for the best film.

What have we done with this organization and these facilities? In our business, you are as successful as you are watched and listened to. In 1953 one of our big newscasts had a Hooperating of 37. An NBC newscast immediately preceding had a rating of 38. A