

TGIF

ALEX BEAM

Carr, Imus: weakening reception

Don Imus, who was briefly the toast of Boston's morning drive-time radio, now has ratings so low they could walk under a rattlesnake with a top hat on.

The I-man, laughably dubbed one of "the 25 most influential Americans" by Time magazine in 1997, took a huge hit when Howard Stern started broadcasting mornings here two years ago. In his key demographic, men between the ages of 25 and 54, Imus's market share declined from 8.4 to 6.6 from winter to spring of 1997. Now it's even lower. The latest Arbitron numbers show Imus off 31 percent among men (4.7 share) from the previous quarter and 58 percent among women, meaning that his two remaining female listeners must be Cokie Roberts and Anna Quindlen, whose work he continually promotes. Stern's own ratings have been declining here, although he remains No. 1 in the morning slot.

Imus didn't answer my respectfully worded fax seeking comment on his "ankle-high" ratings. But 'EEI program director Jason Wolfe rose to the defense – sort of – of the I-relevant man. Wolfe invoked Stern: "Howard takes younger listeners away from everybody and dominates that slot around the country. Imus's core audience is older now." In fact, Wolfe says, Imus's ratings are holding steady in a narrower, older demographic: men aged 35-54. Asked about friction between 'EEI's successful sports show hosts and the lagging Imus, Wolfe deflected the question diplomatically. Imus's contract is up for renewal later this year, and 'EEI will undoubtedly use the subterranean ratings as a bargaining tool.

Another radio favorite of yesteryear – Howie Carr – has ratings problems of his own. Carr's WRKO afternoon drive show has plummeted 42 percent in age 25-54 market-share rankings from a year ago. But at least Carr

and his bosses have some creative excuses. Arbitron added new listeners from Worcester and southern New Hampshire to its survey base, which had an especially negative impact on the Boston-y Carr, says his program director, Kevin Straley. 'RKO officials also attribute their dismal winter numbers to early nighttime meteorological conditions. "After dark, you can barely hear the station in Wellesley," Carr complains.

Wait, there's more!

A defamation claim by Carr's wife, Katherine, against the injudicious I-man has been settled. Here's the background: Carr slurred Imus on his show. Retaliating, Imus slurred Carr's wife. Oooops! Katherine Carr is (was) a private, as opposed to a public, figure. Harvard law prof Alan Dershowitz agreed to handle the claim, working with Kenneth Sweder in the Boston office of Stroock & Stroock & Lavan. Carr hinted on his show that his wife was going to come into some serious money as a result of the settlement, but his lawyers have since told him to keep his trap shut.

Intriguing social note: WRKO, which broadcasts Carr, and WEEI, which handles Imus here, are both owned by Pennsylvania-based Entercom. But Ms. Carr's claim, which was settled before it went to court, was directed against Imus and his syndicator, CBS Radio.

Towering achievement

Fate recently threw me together with the "research director" of the amply staffed Tower Talk, a quarterly newsletter published for the 800 residents of the Towers at Chestnut Hill. That was how I learned that TT had recently won a Community Associations Institute Newsletter of the Year award and that the moving force behind the newsletter was none other than Arnold Rosoff, the founder and longtime chairman of the Arnold & Co. advertising agency.

Rosoff sold Arnold to his employees in 1985. (It has since been sold to Snyder Communications Inc. of Bethesda, Md.) He and his wife moved to the Towers three years ago, and felt a certain lack of community spirit. He wanted to start a newsletter, but the precedent was unpromising: "In the past, someone would publish one issue, and the thing would fold," he says.

But Tower Talk seems to be thriving. Each issue has profiles of Tower residents and staff, travel pointers, book reviews, health tips – and no advertising. Rosoff and his collaborators are all volunteers, and their landlord handles the printing costs for them.

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