

In BROADCASTING magazine in 1960, there is an article on how the CBS Radio Network was doing some major programming changes to take effect in late Nov / early Dec 1960.

All of the Daytime 15-min P&G Soaps (Ma Perkins, Helen Trent, etc) would be cancelled, so that CBS Radio would do an hourly newscast every hour on the hour throughout the day on weekdays and weekends, and it would be TEN minutes long.

Godfrey, Linkletter, etc. daytime "variety" programs would be retained, but trimmed back somewhat.

Suspense and Have Gun Will Travel (with John Dehner as Palladin; Richard Boone was Palladin on CBS-TV) would be cancelled as well.

(Suspense started on the Columbia Broadcasting System in June 1942)...

Gunsmoke (with William Conrad as Marshall Matt Dillon on CBS Radio) and Johnny Dollar (now moving to New York production with Robert Readick, instead of a H'wood production with Bob Bailey) would be retained.

(However, six-months later, in late June 1961, Gunsmoke on CBS Radio got the ax - and the James Arness as Dillon on CBS-TV Gunsmoke went from a half-hour to an hour - still B&W - in Fall 1961; Suspense was returned to the CBS RAD))((O NETWORK in late June 1961; Johnny Dollar was now played by Mandel Kramer instead of Bob Readick, but still produced and fed from NY)...

AND... in the BROADCASTING Magazine article in 1960 regarding the changes in CBS Radio's programming, there was mention about a forthcoming new automation system for alerting stations about news bulletins, but it could also be used to 'cue' stations to local-sale breakaways, divide up the network into different time-zones at Chicago or Hollywood origination for time-zone-delayed hourly news commercial spots, indicate the beginning of a new feed or closing of a program/feed, etc., where the stations could automate themselves somewhat,

maybe to switch-in/out of the network unmanned, or start/stop their cart-machines to tape network feeds or commercials to be played back later, etc. CBS was going to call it NetALERT.

And, the NetALERT system was going to be more enhanced when compared with NBC Radio's (1956 introduced) Hotline system. (Of course, NBC, now Westwood/CBS, has enhanced the Hotline system over the years, with the 'gurgle' sounding cue-tones; CBS/Westwood still uses these 'gurgles' for satellite channels identified as "NBC Radio Network / CNN".

But according to the 1960 article in BROADCASTING, the original NBC Radio Hotline system could only alert stations to a bulletin breaking in if they were monitoring or carrying a network program. It couldn't signal the affiliate if they didn't have someone in the production room listening, or if they weren't carrying a feed over the air. However, considering that the four radio networks had numerous long-form programs, particularly the NBC Radio Network with MONITOR on the weekends, and "Nightline" on weeknites (not to be confused with ABC-TV News Nightline; the later 1950's and early 1960's NBC Radio "Nightline" was a weeknight version of MONITOR), most big-market affiliates were probably carrying most NBC (long form) programs/feeds anyhow.

I have heard some Johnny Dollar (Mandell Kramer) and Suspense tapes from 1961/62 (both CBS Radio dramas were ultimately cancelled at the end of September 1962), where you hear SIX (1960's/70's era) clicking BLEEPs, and then one minute later, a single NetALERT BLEEP. There was no new bulletin breaking in -- I guess that the CBS Radio Network was doing a "dry run" test of their new NetALERT system.

In Spring 1978, CBS Radio replaced the 1961 NetALERT (loud clicking) sequential-counting bleeps (similar to dialpulsing on a rotary phone) with a NEW NetALERT system still in use - which has 'softer' chirps or warbles, a distinct frequency pair of soft chirps for various functions (similar to touchtone phones)...

For a bulletin, instead of sequential beeping of the same bleep signal every split-second for the particular NetALERT "number", the new system could send a unique frequency pair for a particular function.

I can remember when I was in High School in the later 1970's, listening to the CBS Radio Mystery Theatre on WWL/870 (later, WWIW/1450 picked it up when CBS affiliate WWL dropped Mystery Theater in favor of more local sports)... and hearing NetALERT bulletins when they actually broke in live... how there was a "countdown" of five beeps (prior to Spring 1978) then silence, then the (1968-83) real "organ sounding" news jingle and announcer. But beginning in June 1978, the new NetALERT system was cut-in, and you'd hear a single SPECIFIC "chirp", followed by silence, then the news bulletin, whenever such bulletins broke into a feed of Mystery Theatre.

Mutual's "bee-doops" must have been introduced in the early 1970's. CBS/Westwood (the current owner of what was called Mutual) still "bee-doops" on its feeds of CNN news and "Westwood" programs on what used to be satellite channels of what was formerly known as the Mutual Broadcasting System. There were several frequency sequences of "bee-doop"-ing. Sometimes, between two feeds, in the ten seconds of silence, you'd hear a whole series of "bee-doops" of varying frequencies! (almost like hearing the Monitor BEACON jingle in the 1960's!)

ABC Radio ---

I don't know when they started their bulletin alerting automation...

I have a photocopy of the specs on it that I photocopied out of the ABC Operations binder at an ABC (Entertainment Network) affiliate here in New Orleans (at the time WSMB/1350) back in the 1970's...

For general "cuing" automation (start/stop feed/commercial, split-time-zones, etc), it was a high frequency buzz. You can hear that buzz on some of the ABC Cuts at Jeff Miller's website:

<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Derby/6694/index.html>

ABC probably introduced its system in the late 1960's or early 1970's. I haven't found any article in Broadcasting magazine from the 60's or 70's on it-- nor on MutuAlert (yes, the "bee-doops" automation system is/was officially called "MutuAlert". But ABC might have introduced it around 1967/68 (?), in preparation for the "four-way split" of the once single ABC Radio Network -- into the American Information / Entertainment / Contemporary / FM Radio Network program packages.

Around 1982, when ABC Radio introduced two additional packages, the ABC Direction Network, and the ABC "Rock" Network (still at the time all fed down one set of AT&T/Bell System distribution circuits per time-zone, each program package feed sent at different times during the hour), ABC Radio changed to a more "softer" signaling format -- an FSK (Frequency Shift Keying), similar to a modem screech, but higher pitched, and lower in volume. And there could be many functions, depending on the particular frequencies in the tone-burst.

A friend of mine used to work at ABC in NY but about two or three years ago moved to ABC's Dallas operations. He told me that with the latest satellite compression system, ABC dropped audible "cue" tones about two years ago, and the cue/control signals are fed over a separate channel that is not mixed with program audio.

One other thing... CBS Radio (for the REAL/ORIGINAL CBS Radio Network) appears to be the ONLY traditional network with a top-of-the-hour tone...

BONG!

CBS Television dropped the BONG sometime in the 1980's...

When NBC Radio was first swallowed up by Mutual in Arlington VA in Aug/Sept. 1992, they stopped doing their approx. 700-Hz hourly tone... I don't know when that tone ceased on the NBC Television Network, though (I can remember hearing it firing during the harp music of the REAL/traditional Peacock opening up its feathers on NBC-TV during the 1960's/early 70's)...P> Mutual was using a (God-Awful) BLOOP tone at the top/bottom of the hour during most of the 1970's. It ceased circa 1978.

Well, that's about all for now... now you know..... the rrrrrRRREST.... of the Story!

MARK_J._CUCCIA

And now... a response from one of our readers!

Mike,

I am a former radio personality and PD in several California markets. But I started paying attention to what I was hearing on the radio in around 1959. My memory has been described as "encyclopedic", so take the following for what it's worth.

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 Nope. I distinctly remember them as early as the early 1960s. And they may even be older than that. Ron Harris, an engineer at Westwood One may know for sure.

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 I was doing afternoon drive at an AM American Information Network affiliate from 1978 through 1982. The FSK tones did indeed start around 1981 or '82. Of course, the system was in effect for about a year and a half before the cheapskate station owner broke down and bought the little blue box from ABC

that decoded the tones. We always called them "Cricket Tones" because of their high frequency chirp.

Before that, the only other tones I recall on the network (besides the 1Khz beep at the top of the hour, which an ABC engineer once told me ABC purchased from Western Electric) was a 400 Hz tone that was three seconds long, and started ten seconds before the feed.

Ed Ryba

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Editor's note: more comments are very welcome.