

# Holland Cooke Media

Leveraging Talk Radio + Internet

401-330-6868 email@hollandcooke.com @HollandCooke  
PO Box 1323, 1684 Spring Street, Block Island RI 02807 USA



## **TALK RADIO AD BOYCOTT WENT TOO FAR.**

**2 YEARS AFTER FLUKE FLAP, BLACKLISTERS ARE COSTING ADVERTISERS TALK RADIO'S CLOUT.**

**EXCLUSIVE: NATIONAL OPINION SURVEY POINTS TO ONE BAD APPLE.**

There was little doubt that News/Talk is radio's most-Sales-friendly format. Even without perusing heaps of RAB data, you already knew. Because the format itself is spoken word, commercials don't halt things, and it's never background music. Weekend specialty programming is the ideal environment for related service industry retailers. And Talk Radio's host/listener bond elevates live endorsement spots.

And few could move product better than radio's top talker, Rush Limbaugh. Then came Leap Year Day, February 29, 2012, when Limbaugh insulted women's activist Sandra Fluke. When the rant ended three days later, an advertiser boycott had organized, and it continues relentlessly to this day.

The impact has been well-documented. Boycotters boast of hundreds of national brands they've scared-off; and thousands of local advertisers get an earful if their spots air in Limbaugh's show, even if only in ROS rotation. They might be hearing from a local National Organization for Women chapter; but more likely the flak comes from out-of-state boiler rooms monitoring station streams.

Three observations:

1. The boycott hurts big more than small. Listen to what's in Limbaugh's network avails, and you'll hear lots of "enter the Promo Code 'Rush.'" And affiliates in bigger markets depend more on transactional business from spooked agencies than smaller market affiliates that are fueled by local direct retailers.
2. Hearing from the boycotters remains a nuisance in smaller markets. One station owner tells me "we only put a client in the show if they ask to be there." And local clients do continue to renew at Limbaugh-affiliated stations I work with, because they get results.
3. If the entire format is suffering the wrath Rush Limbaugh provoked, advertisers too are suffering as a result. You yourself sit-up-straighter when a couple dozen Emails squawk about something you did, right? Imagine modern day Don Drapers hearing from hundreds, maybe thousands, of the aggrieved, or hearing from a brand CEO who's been similarly-bombarded. Client GMs tell me they've missed buys because the rep firm tells 'em that Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity are also blacklisted. Network executives tell me advertisers as non-controversial as AccuWeather, Wall Street Journal Radio, and Charles Osgood are on Do Not Buy lists. Just logically that seems like overkill, and now data affirms it.

A recently-fielded national opinion survey polled men and women age 25-64, across the USA. These are Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, the consumers radio advertisers want to meet. To participate, they had to report listening to radio 30 minutes per day, and self-identify as listening to Talk Radio "on a regular basis." We got 705, roughly the sample size of umpteen presidential polls we'll be bombarded with for the next two years.

Among issues we probed:

- How are radio's top two talkers doing? Sean Hannity has also been through some changes lately. As the president's re-election intensified the vitriol from many of his on-air political soul mates, regular listeners hear a-more-glass-half-full Sean post-2012. He's emphasizing "Conservative solutions," and talking-up the opportunities in prosperity pockets like North Dakota. But can listeners find him? Sean began 2014 by vacating Cumulus Media stations which included some of the USA's biggest signals, and many of which afforded him a Limbaugh lead-in. Meanwhile Fox News moved his TV show back an-hour-later. And heck, whose frame of mind DOESN'T evolve when they hit The Big Five-Oh?
- How do other major national shows fare?

In that order, results are instructive:

Question: "We'd like to know whether you are familiar with certain talk radio hosts, and how you feel about them. Remember, this survey is anonymous, so please be candid. Choose one of the response options for each of the radio hosts named."

	"I am not familiar with this host."	"I DON'T like this host."	"I LIKE this host."
Rush Limbaugh	11.9%	46.2%	41.8%
Sean Hannity	40.0%	20.3%	39.7%

Follow-up question: "Would you say that, lately, you listen MORE, LESS, or about the same as you listened a year ago?"

	"MORE than a year ago"	"LESS than a year ago"	"About the same as a year ago"
Rush Limbaugh	15.0%	28.2%	56.8%
Sean Hannity	22.5%	22.9%	54.6%

Observations:

- Rush Limbaugh "LIKE" and "DON'T LIKE" numbers are pretty much a tie, and a reminder that part of Talk Radio's appeal is that it is provocative. Many who listen to Rush claim not to be fans...but they do listen. "MORE"/"LESS"/"SAME" responses mirror recent Limbaugh ratings in various markets.
- Sean Hannity's "LIKES" outnumber his "DON'T LIKES" two-to-one; and considering that this survey was fielded in April, after he had recently moved in various markets, his "MORE"/"LESS"/"SAME" scores are impressive.

Two thirds of survey respondents were familiar with two of the other shows we asked about; and in both cases, hosts likely benefitted from television exposure:

	"I am not familiar with this host."	"I DON'T like this host."	"I LIKE this host."
Glenn Beck	29.1%	28.7%	42.3%
Dennis Miller	33.6%	18.2%	48.2%

Note that, with the exception of Rush Limbaugh, all of the hosts above and below have higher "LIKE" numbers than "DON'T LIKE" numbers, in some cases by a multiple.

	"I am not familiar with this host."	"I DON'T like this host."	"I LIKE this host."
Dave Ramsey	48.2%	8.1%	43.7%
Laura Ingraham	52.3%	14.8%	32.9%
Herman Cain	55.7%	18.6%	25.7%
Michael Savage	58.4%	14.8%	26.8%
Mark Levin	65.4%	9.4%	25.2%
Clark Howard	67.0%	7.9%	25.1%
Stephanie Miller	74.0%	8.5%	17.4%

Given how well Talk Radio can deliver for advertisers, and how well-received these other talkers are, shunning the entire format seems as unwise for advertisers as it is unfair to that talent. And the timing of this over-steer couldn't be worse for radio, with money already flowing to digital. If anything, digital demand should pump-up Talk Radio, because research also tells us that radio generally is a superb Internet traffic driver, and because spoken word programming migrates to digital so well.

We've seen this movie before. In fact you can rent it. It's called "The Front," starring Woody Allen, and a cast of actors who were, themselves, blacklisted as pinkos when a United States Senator ran amok in the early 1950s. Radio actors then too were talented performers who could deliver results for advertisers. Both suffered then, as now. Other radio talkers today shouldn't be punished for one bad apple.

*"How DOES Talk Radio sound...to people who DON'T work in Talk Radio?" This national opinion survey probed listeners' preferences on a wide range of business-as-usual issues. Read more in [my monthly newsletter](#).*