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On Radio: Up From the Boneyard: Local Media, Its Digital Death and Rebirth [Part 1]

May 30, 2012

By [Tim Anderson](#)

In truth there are three reasons I began a scholarly interest in media studies: local radio, local record stores, and going to my local movie house. Those morning shows, record clerks, and theaters are the places that I always come back to when I write. So, when I told one student about this in January of 2012, he asked me if I thought there could be any such thing as “local digital media.” My first response was something along the lines of “maybe, but not likely, because the web is focused on communities of interest rather than geography.” To me, the loss of local newspaper staffs and, in some cases, the actual papers themselves, were *prima facie* evidence of a trend out of control. Yet recent life events have changed my mind somewhat and now I think we need to look closely at how people are, and always have, successfully inscribing the local in their digital media creations. No doubt, issues of national and international scale can never leave the scope of the digital domain. However, this column begins to question some of my own assumptions and explore the issue of local digital media beginning, as I indicated above, with a loss.

Indeed, in 2011, Hampton Roads, the portion of Southeastern Virginia where I live, suffered a significant media loss when a 10-year radio drive time show and career came to an abrupt end. Bob Frantz, aka Bob Fresh of Hampton Road’s [The Mike and Bob Show on 96XFM](#), found his show cancelled. Ten years of any media project is exceptional, but in the fickle arena of local broadcasting, shows like *The Mike and Bob Show* were the rarest of birds in a post-1996 Telecommunications Act context. As a staple among the region’s testosterone-fueled audience of military workers, beach bums, and working-class commuters, *The Mike and Bob Show* was in and about the local. Local guys doing dumb local guy stuff that other local guys talked about. Like most drive-time shows, this included stunts at the beach, appearances at local bars and restaurants, interviews when comedians came to town, and, of course, giveaways to concerts and sporting events. Describing the program to me in an interview this April, Bob characterized it as “just guys ‘dicking around’ with no real format, working with no real clock. It was just friends hanging out and being stupid breaking balls, mainly just a lot of fun with Mike and I patrolling and delegating the chaos around us as complained about our bosses, friends, wives, girlfriends.” Immature, silly, and full of dick jokes – lots of dick jokes – it was the kind of program that most of my media studies colleagues wouldn’t bother with, let alone know much about. And if they did know about it most of my colleagues would either find it repulsive or kept silently embarrassed about their enjoyment.



Yet all it took to produce some eye-opening results that would seal the show's fate was a less publicized but important analogue-to-digital media move, [Arbitron's shift from diaries to portable people meters in the Hampton Roads market in mid 2010](#). After the first book was released, *The Mike and Bob Show*, a program that had routinely claimed the number-two position with persons 18-34, was now pegged at dead last in the same demographic. Repositioning the show and jettisoning staff members couldn't save the program from this method-driven nosedive. By the release of the first book of 2011, the show was effectively dead in the water and Bob Frantz's professional radio career was done. With a buyout package in hand and a radio career in afternoon drive that had begun quickly after he graduated with a degree in history from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Frantz decided to begin a podcast. And, thus, [Bob's Boneyard](#), the flagship podcast of what would be an emergent network of shows, came to be.

Of course, these transitions are never that simple nor are they out of the blue. Bob had taken some time off from his show for paternity leave upon the birth of his first child and promptly watched every episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, a show he both loved and seemed logical to mock on the air. However, even though the program could occasionally "talk Trek," the program couldn't find enough room for his own personal TV ramblings. Bob began to think about a *Star Trek* podcast. He had become acquainted with podcasting as his 96XFM radio show posted a podcast and online videos of the show as a [YouTube channel](#). When the program was effectively trimmed back from talking 35-minutes an hour to only 3- to 11-minutes an hour of talking in between MP3s, Bob suggested that the show should produce a podcast. The other members of the staff didn't find the suggestion interesting.



Whatever their reasons for not producing a podcast, Frantz shortly found himself without a job, time to kill before the paychecks and benefits ran out, and time to find a new batch of reasons. Let go in Spring 2011, Bob Frantz quickly decided within days to follow the path of other displaced on-air personalities, such as Marc Maron and Adam Carolla, and begin a podcast. And like Maron and Carolla, Frantz drew from radio talent he once worked with on terrestrial radio to bring the podcast to life. Working with Alfredo Torres and Manny Fresh, the three decided to produce the podcast, *Bob's Boneyard*, a program that would essentially produce much of the same banter – odd, offensive, and localized – that used to take place over the airwaves. Working with Stephane Frantz, Bob's wife and soon-to-be podcasting colleague, the four formed an LLC and moved forward with what would become [a successful Kickstarter campaign](#) that netted enough starting capital for computers, a board, and recording equipment and promotional materials.

What digital taketh, digital giveth, albeit one without any cash-flow and health care benefits. Trying to grow a profitable local podcast with advertisers and cultivate a significant audience would prove something different altogether and is the subject for the second part of this three-part post, which is forthcoming. In the meantime, those interested in listening to the *Bob's Boneyard* podcast can visit their [website](#) or find them in [iTunes](#).