

## 20 Years of Service

The year was 1991. A radio seller and sales manager was about to take the leap of faith familiar to all business owners.

For years, Rod Schwartz had been enjoying success selling his clients the services of Jim Shepler's radio campaigns at Broadcast General Company—first as a salesman in Winona, MN, and then as a sales manager in Pullman, WA. But in 1990, Jim Shepler died, and Broadcast General Company closed its doors.

Rod told Shepler's heirs that he was interested in continuing the business and ended up acquiring its assets. As a result, Grace Broadcast Sales was born.

Rod recalls, "For months I'd been pondering whether or not this was something I should do, praying for divine guidance. The answer came, unexpectedly and dramatically, in the form of two cardboard boxes—filled with floppy discs and manila folders containing Jim Shepler's scripts, mailing lists, flyers—left on my porch by the UPS deliveryman. No invoice. No correspondence. Not even a return address! Now you know why the business is called 'Grace' Broadcast Sales."



Rod in His Element

The first features produced by GBS were for Memorial Day 1991: a series of one-minute vignettes showcasing American servicemen whose gallantry in battle led to the bestowal of our nation's highest military honor, The Congressional Medal of Honor.

Today, twenty years later, "Above & Beyond" remains a favorite of many GBS clients, and it's one of Rod's as well. He says, "I still get goose bumps sometimes as I'm producing these features and thinking about the extraordinary character exhibited by these ordinary Americans, sacrificing their lives, in many cases, to preserve my freedom."

From the beginning, Grace Broadcast Sales was a family enterprise. Rod's wife, Paula, and his daughters, Heather and Rebecca, all helped with the business. "Paula did the bookkeeping, and all four of us did the mailings to stations. We'd stay up until late at night, sometimes into the wee hours of the morning, affixing mailing labels and stamps by hand" to the one-sheet flyers they sent to the stations on Shepler's mailing list.



Heather, Paula, Rebecca

Eventually the company expanded its mailings to stations across the country and did some advertising in trade publications as well. Rod also brought in several outside voice talents to broaden the appeal of his features.

Over the years, GBS has added new campaigns for holidays, seasonal celebrations, and special events to its catalog. Some of these "Sales Boosters," as they are now called, were developed in response to requests from radio station sales departments looking for new ideas to present to prospective advertisers.

One of GBS's most popular campaigns, "Shop Your Hometown Merchants," was created twelve years ago in response to two separate requests within the same week by station clients in North Carolina and Louisiana, each looking for a way to impress upon their listeners the importance of shopping locally. The campaign messages immediately caught on.

According to Rod Schwartz, "We had stations call us after they started airing these features, blown away by the fact that advertisers were calling them, asking how they could be included in the campaign. How often does this happen in radio sales?"

Because their May anniversary coincides with National Military Appreciation Month, Rod encourages interested stations to download two free features the company has produced to honor members of America's armed forces.

May 2011 also marks the second anniversary of RadioSalesCafe.com (RSC), a professional network established by GBS specifically for radio advertising sales executives. "I'd thought of social networking sites like MySpace and then Facebook as something 'the kids' were doing, but by 2009 it had become evident that older people—and more to the point, business people—were starting to nibble around the edges of the phenomenon. So, I asked my younger daughter, Rebecca, to research the applicability of social networking to our business."

Rebecca saw an opportunity to provide a unique service specifically for radio advertising sales people, and urged quick action. Rod agreed to fund it, and he put her in charge of developing the site. Rod then asked a number of GBS's best clients to visit the site, contribute comments, and offer feedback. A few weeks later, Radio Sales Café was officially launched; stations embraced it immediately. According to Rod, "Two years later, RSC has become a thriving, vibrant community of more than 1800 radio sales professionals from all over the world, with a passion for radio and their own work, sharing ideas and helping one another solve day-to-day problems."

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