

# Broadcasting — Orchestrating our Future

By Guy Gougeon

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome this opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you, particularly as an after-lunch speaker, since I believe I can be less formal in approach to my topic.

Choosing the title for an address is not a task to be taken lightly, nor is it for any other activity for that matter. As an aside, and to illustrate, some of you will be aware of the CBC's 13-part series produced in HDTV in 1987, the final title of which was "Chasing Rainbows." Its original title was "Hello Suckers," which caused difficulty in that it was not always possible to know if one was being informed or addressed when hearing that title! Be assured that a suggestion to reuse such a title for my talk today was treated with equal circumspection.

The title of "Orchestrating our Future" I chose because it implies two things: one: that we have a future; and two: that action is required to attain that future.

The Webster's dictionary defines "orchestrate" to mean "to arrange or combine so as to achieve maximum effect." I believe this one word sums up the challenge of the next decade for the players in our industry, and particularly the broadcaster. It conveys the thought that cooperation is needed, and that the desired result is a maximization. I don't believe this is synonymous with domination, nor indeed with capitulation. The theme of cooperation is typified by what the SMPTE tries to achieve in working towards standards through its engineering committees and working groups.

While the definition from Webster is very succinct, it begs the question, "to arrange or combine" — what? Another question is begged, namely "so as to achieve maximum effect" — for whom? In laying out my view of what needs to be "arranged or combined," I would like to quote to you some words by the poet John Masefield, who wrote: "To most of us the



Luncheon guest speaker Guy Gougeon delivering his address.

future seems unsure. But then it always has been and we who have seen great changes must have great hopes."

We have certainly seen great changes in our television industry, both in the technology and in what can be done with that technology and, if we believe Masefield, we certainly qualify to "have great hopes." What do we hope the future holds for our industry? It contains the promise of improved-definition pictures and high-quality sound. It also contains elements which can profoundly affect the business of broadcasting, and these elements are not only technological, but sociological ones too.

We might not wish the result achieved when Groucho Marx observed, "I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set I go into the other room and read a book." The 1990s equivalent of Groucho might say, "I switched channels," or "I used my computer." In other words, the choice is with the viewer, at the end of a remote control.

I believe that the broadcaster, in this post-VCR, post-satellite era, has well recognized that his signal is but one among many viewing opportunities presented to the viewer. While other service providers have come to join the "party," it does not follow

that the place of the broadcaster is at all diminished. Speaking for my own organization, we intend to be present as both program makers and as service providers in any TV structure of the future, and I do not share the view that new technologies on the horizon will spell the demise of the broadcaster, as some are willing to prophesy. The technology of television, if you remember, was widely held to spell the end of the film industry, and we can see how accurate that projection was! Such projections about our industry are likely to prove equally true, I imagine.

In the new decade, the broadcaster must continue to have an awareness of the changes occurring in fields other than technology, and to adapt and profit from those changes.

"We can chart our future clearly and wisely," said Adlai Stevenson, "only when we know the path which has led to the present." In looking to the future, as we start the final decade of the century which saw the birth of our technology and, if we have a dream to make it better, we must take note of our past, the achievements and the pitfalls, and draw lessons from our experience and those sometimes painfully expensive mistakes.

Our industry, along with many others that are at similar states of maturity, cannot escape the call to efficiency, the call to keep costs to a minimum. Our insistence to the manufacturing world to produce products which are designed to be reliable, maintainable, and economic to operate will intensify as the engineering community is called upon to contribute every effect into lean, efficient program productions and operations.

I hope that I strike a chord with you in stating this objective. Its significance for us at CBC may better be appreciated if I were to take a few minutes here to give you a little background about our organization.

The CBC operates both radio and TV networks, both as program producer and broadcaster, but for my purposes here I will only dwell on the television side of our business. We operate two major network centers, one in English and one in French, each producing about 6,000 hours of over-the-air programs per year. Additionally, we operate a further 28 regional

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TV production centers, which produce annually approximately 12,000 hours of programming, including material for local/regional broadcast and contribution to networks. We also program and operate a 24-hour all-news network available only through satellite to cable as part of basic service. We distribute programs by land-line, microwave, and by satellite to 589 owned and operated transmitters, and provide programming for an additional 291 transmitters, either as affiliates or as community-owned re-broadcasters.

The range of programming covers the whole spectrum, from sports through drama, variety, current affairs, arts and entertainment, and so on. A very large operation by any world standard! While we face questions as to whether a broadcaster in the 1990s should continue to be so vertically and horizontally integrated, the fact is that the CBC represents a huge investment of funds in physical plant, people, and skills, an investment which must be fine-tuned to reduce every cent of overhead cost to the benefit of programs. A technology which comes without a strategy to evolve from the current ones would represent a huge cost for us and, I suspect, for many of you too. Lack of such a strategy will perforce delay its adoption. As we are called upon, in this climate of diminishing funds, to manage even more astutely than before, we look to the manufacturing industry to recognize that the priorities we as broadcasters place on equipment are different, perhaps, than those of other industry sectors. Stable performance, high reliability, easy integration, easy maintenance and training will continue to have priority over features.

Let me dwell on this point for a moment. None of us can, or even would wish to, hold back the integration of new technology into our plants. However, we need manufacturers to reassert their commitment to producing complete and working units before they are shipped out of the door. We will continue to insist on full and comprehensive engineering and testing of software-controlled systems prior to their leaving the plant. We no longer have the time or the money to act as beta-sites for supposedly production-run equipment, and we will find ourselves having to return new-technology units that almost work, but don't quite, even if this means

dropping back one level in technology to get reliability and repeatability.

I talked earlier about orchestration, and how it implied partnership, and it follows that an obligation exists on the part of networks and broadcasters to participate with industry in defining what equipment is needed and how it should perform. A much respected vehicle for this has been this very organization, the SMPTE, and other like organizations of national and international character. Yet this obligation also presents us with a dilemma. We do not have all the resources we had in the past, nor as many as we might like to have, to support committee work, and in common with most of you, I suspect, we have to be increasingly selective in what work we can support with representation.

I thus call upon the SMPTE, as I call on like organizations, to focus very clearly on those tasks requiring joint work, and to insist on measurable outputs from committees, in defined time frames. In doing so the SMPTE will make a valuable contribution in facilitating our choices of participation and the cooperative effort needed to orchestrate our future.

Can I pull together the thoughts running through my last few points? Leanness and efficiency in the next decade will enable us to participate fully in earning our future; complex and costly will have little place.

I now want to address another aspect of orchestrating our future, specifically that we keep in focus those sectors that are intended to benefit from the endeavors of the technical side of broadcasting.

I see these as being in two groups, essentially — our own production staff and eventually, the viewer. As the great power of microelectronics opens up more and more opportunity it will be our challenge to use it to liberate the creative staff from the complexity of the current-day sophistication. In his book, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, Antoine de Saint Exupery said, "The machine does not isolate man from the great problems of nature but plunges him more deeply into them." I would paraphrase those thoughts by saying that, in the next decade, our machines must not isolate our production people from the great opportunities of their craft, but allow them even greater control. I suppose I am making a case for the eventual need to not interface creators to technical facilities through technical staff.

I look, therefore, to cooperation by all industry segments to provide greater integration of control systems and signal formats, of videotapes, disc recorders, graphic units, and the like into powerful workstations designed to present a simple interface to a non-technical person, while preserving simplicity, effectiveness, and economy. Our interest, of course, is not to be seen as wishing to preserve our technical mystique, but to remove it.

As to how we orchestrate to benefit the viewing public, engineers working through associations such as the SMPTE, NAB, CABSC, ATSC, and so on have an important obligation not to lose heart in the search for the common ground essential if the standards defining both production and distribution are to emerge for a new improved-definition television service. We have the inventiveness, we have the courage, but we must also have the statesmanship if we are to provide affordable technical strategies to our policy-makers. Without this effort, we will not have done our best to bring pictures and sound of high quality, offered by advanced television, within reach of our viewers.

I would not like to conclude my talk without emphasizing the need for all industry sectors to deal with training, and I'll quote former U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson when he said, "We must open the doors of opportunity. But we must also equip our people to walk through those doors." In the demanding times of the next decade budgets will be tight, and if the past is any indicator of the future, training budgets will come under heavy attack for elimination. And yet, if only some of the challenges that I have touched upon today are to be met, we cannot afford to short-change the training efforts.

I have outlined this afternoon some of the challenges I see before us, and have suggested to you that by continuing and enhancing our joint efforts we can orchestrate a future every bit as exciting as our past. I am optimistic about the ability of our industry to rise to the challenge in a proactive and supportive manner, and will leave you with this thought from another U.S. President, Franklin D. Roosevelt: "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today."

Thank you very much for your attention.