

Publication: Vancouver Province; Date: Aug 28, 2005; Section: E-Today; Page: 112



Ex-Vancouver DJ sure knows JACK

RADIO: Howard Cogan succeeds as voice-over guy behind hot format

He just may be the most listened-to broadcaster in North America. And while he's heard every day by multi-millions of people across the continent, he doesn't have his own radio show, no one knows who he is and few have any idea what he looks like.

His name is Howard Cogan but to scores of listeners he's Jack — the laid-back big-buck voice-over guy behind the mega-successful radio format's image campaign.

Born in Ottawa, Cogan was a radio junkie as a kid and got his start at CJBQ in the eastern Ontario township of Belleville.

"I operated the board for a Belleville Bulls hockey game," he says. "The program director said if the game ended early I could go on the air. The game ended at 11:20 p.m., I played the Boomtown Rats' 'I Don't Like Mondays,' and taped my 40-minute show, which got me a



Joe Leary
AIR TRAFFIC

job in nearby Kingston. Even though I was horrible, hey, I was cheap."

Cogan logged some years in the '80s behind the mic of Vancouver's then-powerhouse Top 40 outlet, LG73 (730 AM), as Howie the Hitman.

"I quite often heard sports reports out of Detroit about the boxer Thomas Hearns — the Motor City Hitman. At the ripe old age of 18, I thought that was the coolest name ever and it worked well for radio, so in London, Ont., I went with the Forest City Hitman. After moving to Vancouver, program director Brad Phillips was a big advocate of me keeping the name as it

went well with LG73's Hot Hits format. At the time, I started to realize that nicknames were better than actually changing your name and stealing some poor sucker's identity out of the phone book."

Cogan realized that nobody of his generation had reached superstar status as a radio DJ. So, at the urging of co-worker and local voice-over god Jim Conrad, he pursued the lucrative voice-over market when he was at ROCK 101 (101.1 FM).

"I could see the role as the DJ in a music-driven format diminishing, not to mention that I've spent my entire career figuring out how to make a living without having to get up at 4 a.m. I remembered Conrad encouraged me to give voice work a try because he thought I had a sound that would work."

It most certainly did and, some years later, Cogan's voice-over career and subsequent income took a massive leap forward with the arrival of JACK-FM.

"I sent a tape to Pat Cardinal, who was the program director at Xfm (now Clear-FM 104.9

FM). He passed it on to the folks at Rogers, who were in the process of searching for a new format for KISS-FM (now JACK-FM). Timing is everything and the rest is history."

Cogan's pipes now resonate on some 33 radio stations across North America and, while his voice is prevalent on those airwaves in key radio markets, his identity remains concealed. "Jack is a character," he says. "And because it's a character on radio, there is no visual attached

to it. What better way to destroy someone's image than staring at my mug?"

Living in Toronto, the father of three is one of the most in-demand voice guys in the country, making a sizable income from home. "The best part of being a voice actor is that you work for yourself, so you have no one else to blame," he says. "Not having all your eggs in one basket is crucial in today's world — no matter what you do."

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