
Coop's TV History

Including:
**CATJ / Community Antenna Television
Journal**
and
CSD / Coop's Satellite Digest



Without shame

These are my two favorites. **CATJ** was born during 1974 in my office at CADCO (Community Antenna Development Company), Oklahoma City. From a bench in my garage in 1970, CADCO had grown to be a major supplier of extremely innovative cable television hardware - from massive logi (and UHF parabolics to 24 feet in diameter) through headend processors, trunk and line extender amplifiers, directional couplers and taps - *we did it all*. In 1973, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced new regulatory plans for cable, adopting rules which made any (cable or antenna) system with 51 or more "subscribers" subject to technical, franchising, and business standards dictated from Washington. My customers at CADCO were 90% the "little guys" - 'Mom and Pop' cable / community antenna system operators, typically with a few hundred subscribers, serving small rural towns 70-150 miles from the nearest TV stations. The FCC's proposed rules would put these folks out of business.

With Kyle D. Moore, a cable operator from Oklahoma, and Joe Davis from Arkansas, CADCO had arranged a series of 18 regional meetings spanning the USA from coast-to-coast where we invited FCC personnel to come out of their closet-offices to meet and talk with *real* cable folk - the kind who climbed their own towers, ran their own cable, did their own house hookups. From those meetings a new cable trade association, in direct opposition to the long established NCTA (National Cable Television Association), evolved. We called it CATA (Community Antenna Television Association).

CATA by late 1973 had grown into a potent trade political force, representing more than 500 independent cable systems. But they needed full-time management and, I felt, a much higher visibility. Thus was **CATJ** announced - it would join an already crowded field of cable trade journals as the "spokes-bible" of the smaller, independent cable operators. Initially, I tried to be CEO for CADCO which had matured into a 70+ employee business and the behind the scenes 'general manager' for CATA. There were objections to my duplicity - some cable operators, not fond of CATA, made it very clear: "*Get out of CATA or we stop buying equipment from CADCO*". I shocked them all by doing the opposite - handing my stock portfolio in CADCO over to a Texas oil man who already held a minor stake in the company and giving up any and all claim to the assets I had grown in CADCO. It probably cost me a few million dollars to make this personal decision - but 'saving the small town cable operator' seemed much more important to me, at that time. Standing on one's principal can sometimes be very expensive.

CATJ began in May 1974; a smallish, heavily hands-on technical monthly, which almost nobody gave better than 10% odds of success. But it did succeed, first and foremost because it was one of the most superb technical publications ever to be published. It achieved this level of recognition

in 18 months from a dead zero start, attracting more paid subscribers than all of the other cable trades combined with 24 months.

As luck would have it, in 1975 as the first sprouts of satellite TV snuck out of the ground, CATJ was not only there to nurture the budding TVRO but my personal intense all consuming interest in the subject drove the magazine (and CATA - the trade association) to new levels of recognition. CATJ, the publication, with 'Coop' as editor, created virtually every first required to turn TVRO from a very expensive (\$125,000) professional system affordable only by the largest cable systems into what ultimately became \$1,000 home dish systems.

By 1979, it was very plain to me that as my own experimental work and that of other early pioneers in "private" (we never used the word "*home*" in those days!) TVRO was heading towards family-affordable C-band dish systems, conflicts with the cable TV industry were inevitable. After all, it had been cable (well, CATA and CATJ) that had torn the heart out of big-dish \$125,000 systems and it was cable that "owned" and "operated" the programming from sources such as HBO, Showtime, Ted Turner and others. It was only a matter of time - and not a very long time - before cable realised, "*Hey guys! Those 'privates' are stealing our channels!*"

Once again, time to move on. June 1979 CATJ was my last (the magazine continued for a period after this, quickly becoming as bland as the staff hired to replace me) and as my 'going away present' I left cable with an intriguing front cover article reporting on Stanford Professor H. Taylor Howard's "*home dish*" TVRO system he had created. Time to take off the gloves. Yeah, I know - that was kind of 'dirty pool' but hey, for reasons only revealed in my late 2005 book release ("Video Pirates: Hiding inside your TV set!"), cable deserved a kick in the groin.

From July 1979 onward, it was all uphill at a frenetic pace. After taking three months off, CSD (Coop's Satellite Digest) popped into circulation - 1,500 copies the first month (satellite founder Arthur C. Clarke on the cover), rapidly ramping up to more than 5,000 as the "home" dish industry grew. From 36 pages in issue one, CSD shot upward to more than 200 pages by 1984 split between two issues per month (CSD2 on the first, CSD on the 15th).

CSD was a timely reflection of an entire industry (including the bad and the ugly - of which there was much). I once saw a copy on a coffee table inside the White House; every level of television programmer, network executive, and yes - the United States Department of Justice, poured through each issue searching for some sign of industry malfeasance or outright illegal behavior. For, you see, C-band "*home*" (there's that 'forbidden' word, again) dish systems were right on the edge of being 'illegal' - even after some fancy laws were passed to try to make them legal (October 1984).

The 'CSD years' (through mid 1986 - after which it was, "Will the last guy installing a new dish please shut out the lights when leaving the industry?") were unlike any similar period of time (6 + years) in American history. It was the electronic equivalent of the 'Prohibition' era; "home" dish reception was the TV bootleg hooch for millions of folks who invested money in the most exciting, unregulated, totally out of control entertainment sky rocket of the 20th century. It was, with plenty of warning (which few heeded), going to self-implode leaving behind a trail of debris stretching from Tokyo to Miami - the 'long way' around.

The marriage...

So there you have it. 1974 - 1979 CATJ, 1979 - 1987 CSD; 13 years of my life painstakingly scribed in something over 7,000 pages (working out to 1.5 pages a day - a mere 750 words, hardly a challenge to a dedicated journalist). *This is not as good as it gets*. For that, see "VIDEO PIRATES", a much more human side to television's 'bad boys', out late 2005.