



# 2016: Something To Talk About

**H**eading into the 2016 election year, many ears will be turning to talk radio. And in Philadelphia, election talk will be keeping Chris Stigall's morning show phone lines ringing at WPHT. I asked the popular host to share his reflections on the format and its powerful connection with listeners.



Chris Stigall

## What brought you to make the transition from music to a talk show format?

As clichéd as this may sound, it's true: It was September 11, 2001. Not so much the tragic day itself, but the day after, and the days and weeks after that. I'll never forget feeling, "I have this microphone. I have real questions. Everyone is afraid, and angry, and sad. I want to talk to people about it."

## Does talk radio reflect the conversation, or direct it, especially in terms of political?

It reflects the majority of the audience, in my opinion. But it often forces the direction of media coverage that ignores certain points of view. Talk radio listeners are often branded as monolithic. I call our audience "the smartest audience in all of radio." There is not an issue I could raise on any day that someone in our audience doesn't know more about than me.

Talk radio audiences don't want lectures. They sense smugness, bias, and inauthenticity. Talk radio audiences want to be entertained and informed. Talk radio gives serious, thoughtful people a place to share their points of view, but they also like to have fun and laugh.

## How do you keep a daily talk show relevant, especially in a 24/7 news environment?

As long as there's Twitter, I'll never worry. Every week, if not every day, some athlete, celebrity, or politician or business will stoke the "outrage factory" into production. They're often silly stories, but sometimes they swallow days and weeks of news cycles. Social media is the best gift talk radio ever received. Politically, our nation has never been in more tumult. I'm actually anxious for a "slow day." Can't remember the last one.

## How has social media changed your relationship with listeners?

I do love Twitter. I don't like using it as a texting feature with listeners. I love retweeting listeners' pithy, biting, funny comments and observations about the show or the news of the day.

Twitter allows the show to continue all day if I want.

But a caution: We, and our advertisers, often make the mistake of assuming one or two or even a dozen negative tweets requires panic or "corrective action" of some kind. That is a terrible mistake. The instant nature of tweeting rattles a lot of people on the receiving end. As an industry, we must resist the temptation to give in to Twitter mobs who want to harass us into silence. For some reason, if our phones are blowing up with angry, emotional callers, we'd call that a great day, yet if we or our advertisers and management get two nasty tweets, it somehow feels more personal.

We must change our reaction to Twitter. Think of it as nothing different than a listener's phone call, without a call screener between you and them.



## Does radio have assets that you think could be better managed to drive more listening?

Talk radio needs the industry to remind the audience we're there. Whether it's your favorite sports team's loss or win or a big news day, folks need to be reminded that there are hosts who want to talk with them right now, in their car or streaming on their desktop or phone. We're our own asset, but in an increasingly mobile-device-driven culture, we need our broadcast partners to remind folks why what we do is special and unique. There's a whole generation coming up that won't have radio at the top of its mind unless told we're here.

## Is there a particular interview you have done that stands out?

Hands down, the greatest thrill was interviewing Rush Limbaugh. I had the opportunity to talk to him via ISDN in 2013, and it was all I'd hoped it would be. It had almost nothing to do with politics. We talked about our industry, golf, his family, and Philadelphia. To get the chance to talk to the man that quite literally created the venue from which I earn my living was mind-blowing. He's the gold standard. The rest of us are just doing our best to maintain it. **INK**

**In this season of holidays and reflection, wishing all peace on earth. Thank you for reading Radio Ink!**

– Deborah Parenti, Publisher

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