



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

The NAB Show: Info, Gear, Friends, and a Haboob



By Kevin Kidd

[April 2015] Each person brings a different viewpoint to the experience of attending the NAB Spring Show. Veteran broadcast engineer and tower rigger Kevin Kidd's presents his own report on the week in Las Vegas.

In the radio hall, the hair is getting thinner and grayer. The walk from the Riviera to the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) has been extended. And in the video hall the skirts are getting shorter.

Or, maybe it all just seems like that.

No, I am complaining but just sharing a well-researched point.

THE EYES HAD IT

Trust me: the robot girls were interesting and not just a little disconcerting.

It took a moment's study to determine that they were in fact elaborate costumes and not some type of animatronic thingies. More research on this point was scheduled for Wednesday but was postponed due to watery eyes and the sniffles from about 100 pounds of wind-blown crud – as we walked back to the Riviera in the middle of

an unscheduled Haboob (NAB, NWS and other acronyms need to get together on this kind of thing). [Click here if you want to see what it looked like.](#) Want more? Search YouTube for "Haboob."

Letting people get caught halfway across the Gold Lot without SCUBA's or even goggles seems to be sort of irresponsible.

A VERY BUSY SITE

The 2015 NAB Show had its highest attendance since 2001, and it showed.

For example, the shuttle bus routes around the LVCC seemed to be really messed up this year. It took all of 10 minutes to get from the Riviera to the first stop at the South Hall. But, then taxi congestion and a bus backup caused a 20+ minute trip just to get from that South Hall bus stop around the corner to the main Central Hall stop every morning. I sure did not recall it being this bad in years past.

Thankfully it was just a short walk across the Gold Lot from the Riviera to LVCC. Note that I said "was" – the Riviera is closing May 4th, and will soon be blowed up. (Yes, I know that it will

be actually be blown up but I am from Tennessee and I do talk this way.) It is sort of a bummer. Although the Riviera was getting a little (OK a lot) long in the tooth, it is a historic and nostalgic old girl. Unfortunately, in the grand scheme of things economic, history and nostalgia have little standing. Sad.

THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING

As most attendees know, there is no lack of things to do – and that does not include the typical Las Vegas attractions. Here is a look at what I thought were the best parts of the show.

Sunday: The annual Nautel Users' Group (NUG) was a really worthwhile event and should be a regular stop for Nautel owners/maintainers. Getting a heads up on new products, troubleshooting information, and updates is worth many times the price of admission (and it is free) - *and* they feed you lunch.

Noting the imminent demise of the Riviera Hotel, questionnaires were circulated at the NUG, asking for suggestions for future venues. As I have always stayed at the Riviera or (cringe) CircusCircus, I really could not offer much advice. Suffice it to say, as the LVCC continues to grow and consume everything in its path, close-in choices are getting harder to find.

Interestingly, at this year's NUG, there was a large group of protestors chanting something about "Save the Tubes, Stop Nautel!" However, the protest in memory of the tubes never became heated (the filament leads were missing?) and thusly allowed things to remain in a solid state.

Monday: The AM Boot Camp was a series of interesting and informative presentations.

Originally envisioned as a sort of quick-start group of papers for folks relatively new to the RF side of an AM broadcast plant, the program seemed to attract a more experienced audience who appreciated the review and reminders of things we need to use while maintaining AM stations.



AM Boot Camp presenters included Ron Rackley, Ben Dawson, Alan Alsobrook, Cris Alexander, John Warner, Tom Ray, and Guy Berry.

Later on, there was a panel discussion on digital broadcasting on the AM band which included Andrew Skotdal, Ben Downs, Glynn Walden, Greg Borgen and Ben Dawson.

Tuesday: This turned into a day for a lot of good networking and research. I specifically was looking at moderate priced network capable remote control systems and cheap audio console solutions for a couple clients. I stopped in at several booths to look at their remote control offerings. I also dropped in at the Henry Engineering booth to look at their mini console for a low budget client.



Henry Engineering's Wall of Solutions

[Barry's Tuesday Lunch Gathering](#) was enjoyable and informative as always. Everybody left with a door prize or two *and* learned some important information from the featured speakers, Cary Tepper and Laura Mizrahi.

KEEP ON WALKING!

Tuesday afternoon, my Samsung Note 4 started encouraging me to reach my goal of 10,000 steps per day.

Although I had already passed some 8800 steps, for some reason it did not seem to understand my command of “Butt Out! My knee's have had all this abuse that they can stand today.” And then there was Tuesday's dust storm, errrr, Haboob.

Nevertheless, there it was again: “Buzz, buzz... You are only 1100 steps away from making your goal.” “Hey little guy, this is *your* goal. Leave me alone, I'm headed to the slots!”

I did wonder a bit if Siri understands the command “butt out,” because Android's “Assistant” app seems to be oblivious to the command. (I also tried several other less family friendly commands ut with no success there either.)

MORE INFO, INTERESTING SITE

Gary Cavell's RF Boot Camp was also interesting and informative.

The program was much more basic than the AM Boot Camp, but in observing the “Campers,” I saw a lot of lights turn on as to why things RF are as they are. The crowd seemed to be made up of everything from management types struggling to understand engineer speak to grizzled engineering veterans looking for new information and technology that they might not otherwise be exposed to know.

I think everyone took something useful away from the highly qualified panel that included Gary Cavell, Cindy Cavell, Dan Ryson, and Mike Rhodes.

There was time for a few minutes on the show floor and the day was done.

Thursday: This day was devoted to a couple of meetings with venders and a special drive out across the desert - almost 300 miles of a drive.

Leaving the Riviera, I drove down just over the California border to the Ivanpah Solar Power Plant and ecologically friendly bird roaster. Currently the world's largest solar thermal power

facility, Ivanpah has some 350,000 mirrors on the 4,000 acre site focused on three solar power towers, generating nearly 400 Megawatts of power.



Afterward, I circled around through the back road (singular) to the Death Valley National Park and back to Vegas. If you ever need to reacquaint yourself with exactly how insignificant you really are, take an 80-mile drive on a dune hugging two-lane highway across the wide open desert.

SUMMING IT UP

Thinking back over the week, here are stray thoughts about the interesting stuff I saw. Oh, did I mention the skirts? Yeah, OK...

It was nearly impossible to miss all the drone cages, some containing drones that will lift a static load of 200 pounds. According to the PMG representative, that is well over the published ratings, but they had lifted this much in “informal testing.” I am sure that he meant to say “playing,” but I did not correct him.



Although I am 100% radio I was impressed by the tiny new LED lighting systems for TV.

Not exactly on the show floor, but I noticed the mountains of booth packing crates stored outside of each hall are somehow a thing of geometric beauty to me. I hope they made it safely through the Haboob.

The off-shore transmitter equipment is looking better. I imagine that support will continue to be the major separating factor between the off shore and US equipment but it seems to be improving technically.

Liquid cooled transmitters? At first, I worried this may be a sad joke foisted on us radio folks by the high brow TV types. But GatesAir and Rohde & Schwarz were showing liquid cooled FM transmitters up to 40 kW. Funny, I have spent all my professional life trying to keep liquids out of equipment – especially transmitters.

On the other hand, there are sites where being able to locate a heat exchanger remotely might be a real plus. Humm. I have told people that the new transmitters will do everything but make coffee. Maybe this is a step in that direction.



As always, RDL had some neat new products. They were showing their new Cat5 connected (not IP network connected) equipment using common Cat5 cables. Speakers, level controls, and 3-source input selectors that fit into the Decora-type wall switch plates and are inter-

connected by common Cat5 cables.

By the way, saying Haboob out loud in a crowd of strangers will get you looked at rather oddly. But saying Haboob out loud just feels good.

I have officially determined that for broadcast gadgets: If; Broadcast Tools does not make it, RDL does not make it, and Henry Engineering does not make it, you probably do not need it (or had better be prepared to build it yourself).

And finally a few left over stray thoughts:

The Casino Buffets seem to be getting sparse at all venues. No fried shrimp anywhere? Is there an anti-crustacean movement going on in Las Vegas?

The CRTech gathering was enjoyable as always.

To conclude:

All in all it was a successful and enjoyable show for me. The crowd of 103,042 was larger than last year. Several vendors commented that they were having more serious inquiries than in the past few years and we can continue hoping that the radio side of the business is picking back up.

And now the obligatory close to all small town social columns: A good time was had by all...

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