How to recruit new contesters

Doug Grant K1DG
How many licensed hams are “active” HF operators?

- CQWW (biggest contest):
  - About 8000 logs per mode, involving about 16,000 operators

- Unique good callsigns in those logs:
  - 38,792 SSB  23,193 CW   8,266 both modes
  - COMBINED: 53,716 unique good calls

- Biggest DXpeditions work 25,000 – 50,000 unique callsigns (K5D 32,000)

- There are around 2.5 Million hams in the world, so active HF operators is about 1-2%

- How do we get the other 98% in the game?
CQWW and FT8 Operator Census

CQWW 2018 Operators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CW</th>
<th>SSB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>single ops</td>
<td>7803</td>
<td>7945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multiops</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ops at multiops</td>
<td>1654</td>
<td>3206</td>
</tr>
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</table>

TOTAL OPERATORS, EITHER MODE: 16,736

FT8 CALLSIGNs WORKED BY LARGE “ROBOT STATION”
Aug 2017 – Apr 2019: 19,980
FT8 – CQWW Overlap

TOTAL POPULATION 33,159

13,179 (80%) WW Only (CW/SSB)
3,244 (10%)
16,376 (83%) FT8 Only
Other guys on HF

- Nightly (daily) roundtables and nets
  - 75M – 400 kHz, spaced 5 kHz = 80 groups
    - maybe 5 per channel across the U.S. = 400 groups
  - 40M – 175 kHz, spaced 5 kHz = 35 groups
    - 5/channel, 175 groups
  - 20M – 200 kHz, 40 groups, maybe 2/channel
    - 80 groups
- 655 groups, 10-20 ops per group = 13k HF ops

Can we get these guys on the air on contest weekends?
Average age of hams is...?

- KG5HVO is giving a talk later on getting “youth “involved in contesting

- How do we get “Oldth” involved (there are LOTS MORE of them)?

- Most radio clubs have more Medicare recipients than millennials/Gen-Xers
Some people are just not going to be interested

- “Every night for 20 years on this frequency” ops
- “14300” and “7200” guys
- AMers
- QRP/microwave builders
- SDR “builders” (“I needed a transmitter to test the antenna so I wrote one”)
Newer HF operators see the game differently

- “What do you mean I shouldn’t look a call up on QRZ.COM if I didn’t copy his state?”

- “Prefills are my friend”

- “Headphones? Why? Just let the computer copy it.”

- Just keep calling…and calling….and calling…
This really happened one night when I was on FT8

- I received an email from a guy in RI that said: “Doug needing NH for WAS and I’m on 1773 20M now can you help me out?”
- New ops only know one frequency on each band

- I had already moved to another band, but replied that we could try...he was already calling me on 40M FT8.

- 18 (!!!) emails later, we completed a QSO

- Confirmed that night on LOTW
New ops don’t speak our language

“Pyrrhuloxia” is:

a. A gum disease
b. A type of volcanic rock
c. A songbird of the American Southwest
d. Forensic evidence in an arson investigation
e. N9JA’s middle name
Operating with a newbie

Which of these is a callsign?

a. 2ASTX
b. CQFD
c. QRZ
d. W1AW
e. IC7610
We have to meet prospective new contesters where they are

- They have no experience with tuning in SSB signals
- Some think that stations should transmit on exact kHz (14.200.00)
- Their “channel selectors” click
- They don’t copy by ear – some have never used the speaker in their radio
- They have never turned the big knob
- EVERYTHING in HF contesting is new to them
Best chance is to get involved with a local club

- Go to their pre-FD meetings
- Volunteer to help (but don’t be too pushy)
- Go to FD
- Offer to do CW - most clubs don’t have many (or any) CW ops
- Sit with a phone op and help them (logging, etc.)
- Bring two pairs of headphones and an audio splitter
Field Day

- Not really a contest, but the higher scores are listed first
- “Gateway drug” of radiosport
IF there is interest, volunteer to do a talk about contesting

- After FD, maybe before NAQP
- Or in the fall before SS
- Feel free to use the following slides…they were developed for a similar purpose over several iterations and will help you get started
Why operate contests?

- Improve operating skills
- Uncover weak spots in your station
- Pickup new states, countries, etc.
- FUN!!!!
Skills involved

- Copying the other station’s exchange accurately
- Having a big enough signal to be heard
- Knowing when to call between the bigger signals
- Knowing which band is the best at the time
- Ability to maintain focus for 48 hours

ALL OF THESE SKILLS WILL HELP YOU IN PUBLIC SERVICE ACTIVITIES
When was the First Contest?

- “The first contest was when the third guy got on the air” …FCC Official

- Early amateur radio was all about message relaying
  - Some wondered how far their signals could reach

- The first “TransAtlantic Tests” were held in the early 1920s, organized by M. B. Sleeper of “Everyday Engineering” magazine in the U.K.
The Object of the Game

- Contact as many other stations as possible…
- …in as many other states/countries/zones…
- …in a given time period (anywhere from 30 minutes to 48 hours)
- Contacts only count if they are accurately executed (callsign and “exchange” logged correctly)
The First Successful Transatlantic Test - 1921

- It was also the first DXpedition – Paul Godley took the best available receivers to Ardrossan, Scotland
- Copied 26 North American stations (most ~200 meters)
The First Official “contest”

- 1927 International Relay Party, sponsored by ARRL
- Two weeks long in May 1927
- Wavelengths as short at 20 meters were in wide use
First VHF Contest

- Also in 1927, on 5 meter band

- Covered in the “Experimenter’s Section” of QST

- “Try to keep your wave between 4.9 and 5.1 meters” (58.8 and 61.2 MHz)
Contests of all kinds

- North American QSO Party
  - Operate 10 of 12 hours, 100W max power
  - Exchange: name and state
  - May work that same station on multiple bands

- ARRL November Sweepstakes
  - Operate 24 of 30 hours
  - Based on message handling – long complicated exchange
  - Work station only once regardless of band
More…

- State QSO Parties
  - World works target state (FL, CA most popular)
  - Many mobile stations going from county to county

- North American Sprint
  - 4 hours long
  - Special QSY rule
International Contests

- ARRL International DX Contest
  - 48 hours long; World works USA/Canada
  - Last weekend of Feb (CW); 1st weekend of March (SSB)

- CQ World Wide DX Contest
  - 48 hours long; World works world
  - Last full weekend of Sept (RTTY), Oct (SSB), Nov (CW)

- CQ WPX Contest
  - Operate 36 of 48 hours; World works world;
  - Prefixes are multipliers
  - Feb (RTTY); March (SSB); May (CW)
The World Radiosport Team Championship

- The “Olympics of Ham Radio”
  - Held every 4 years
- Top two-operator teams from around the world
  - Identical power and antennas
  - Same geographic area
- Operator skill and strategy determine the winners
Most contests have multiple categories

- **Single-operator**
  - Assisted = DX Cluster

- **Multi-operator**
  - (1, 2, or “unlimited” transmitters)

- **High power, low power, QRP**

- **“Overlay” categories**
  - “Rookie”, “Tribander/wire”
How to get into a contest

- Get on the air!
  - No pre-registration required

- Review the rules first
  - Who can work you for points?
  - What is the exchange?

- Find a station calling “CQ Contest”, make the QSO, log it
  - Then work another one!
During the contest - A Contest QSO

- “CQ Contest, Kilo One Delta Golf”
  - K1DG, using standard phonetics is soliciting contacts
- “Whiskey One Alfa Whiskey”
  - W1AW is calling K1DG
- “W1AW, 59 1234 New Hampshire”
  - K1DG is giving W1AW a signal report, serial number, and his state
- “K1DG, QSL, 59 001 Connecticut”
  - W1AW confirms he copied K1DG’s exchange, then gives his exchange
- “Thanks…K 1 Delta Golf, Contest”
  - K1DG confirms he has received W1AW’s exchange, announces he is ready for the next caller

CTU

CONTEST UNIVERSITY

ICOM®
A More Realistic Contest QSO

- “CQ Contest, Kilo One Delta Golf”
  - K1DG, using standard phonetics, is soliciting contacts
- “Whiskey One GLB#FY%ST%KQ@WX&ZSK”
  - A W1 and a bunch of other guys are calling K1DG
- “W1something, 59 1234 New Hampshire”
  - K1DG only heard the W1 part of the callsign, and is giving that station a signal report, serial number, and his state
- “K1DG, my call is W1 Alfa Whiskey…QSL, 59 001 Connecticut”
  - W1AW repeats his call, confirms he has copied K1DG’s exchange, then gives his exchange
- “W1AW…thanks…K 1 Delta Golf, Contest”
  - K1DG confirms he has the callsign correct now, has received W1AW’s exchange, announces he is ready for the next caller
A Very Bad Contest QSO

- "CQ Contest, Kilo One Delta Golf"
  - K1DG, using standard phonetics is soliciting contacts
- "Whiskey One PQMN&XW%PR$YO@WI#LJDFKSLJ"
  - A W1 and some other stations are calling K1DG
- "W1something, 59 1234 New Hampshire"
  - K1DG only heard the W1 part of the callsign, and is giving that station a report, serial number, and his state
- "K1DG, this is KC4XYZ - Kentucky Cocacola 4 X-Xray Y-Yellerbelly Z-Zinjanthropus - KC4XYZ - did you come back to me?"

What part of this is wrong?
Don’t say more than necessary, and NEVER EVER say…

- “Please copy”
- “QSL the 59 1234 New Hampshire, my report to you is…”
- “Who is your QSL manager?”
- “Do you know my friend Charlie up there in New Hampshire?”

Imagine you are the guy on the other end, listening to “Please Copy” 5000 times in a weekend!
Keeping track

- Many logging programs available
  - Some are free, some cost a few dollars
  - Most for PC/Windows, some for Mac, some for Linux
  - Better-suited than general-purpose everyday loggers

- What they do
  - Track stations worked (so you don’t make a duplicate contact)
  - Track multipliers worked
  - Score computation
  - Send pre-recorded CW or voice messages
  - Produce Cabrillo-format log for submission to sponsor
Common misconceptions about contests

- “Contesters are rude and obnoxious”
  - Are there any rude obnoxious people on your 2M repeater?

- “There are too many contests.”
  - Most contests are single-mode. There are *none* on the “new bands” (12, 17, 30 meters, which we have had since 1979…)
More misconceptions

- “Contesters all run illegal power”
  - No…but since they usually have superior locations and antennas, it may seem like they are!

- “The only way to win is to have the biggest station”
  - Compare to car racing…a good driver in a slower car can beat a poor driver in a faster car.
And more…

- I only have a small station…it won’t be much fun
  - Set reasonable expectations

- I can’t copy CW well, so I’ll never be any good
  - Practice, practice, practice…

- I’m too old
  - You can be competitive into your late 60s, even 70s
After the contest…

- Send in your log, no matter how big or small
  - It helps the log-checking process
  - Email or Web upload

- Compare your score to:
  - last year
  - guy across town

- Upload your log to LoTW
  - Watch the QSLs roll in

- “How can I do better?”
Resources...

- CQ-Contest email list
- “Contest Update”
- Your local/regional Contest Club
- Contest University
- National Contest Journal
- WWROF.org Webinars, etc.

Available at Amazon.com
What you will get from Radiosport

- You will improve your operating skill
- You will improve your station
- You will learn more about propagation
- You will make friends worldwide
- You and your station will be ready for anything
- You will have fun!
73 &
see you in the next contest!