

Contesting 101

By Kirk Pickering, K4RO

Giving Back To Contesting

Contesting is one of those activities in life where you get out of it exactly what you put into it. For many casual operators, contesting is simply an occasional pastime; something to do as a pleasant distraction from life's routines and worries. It occupies a small part of their lives, and little thought is given to the work involved behind the scenes. For others, contesting takes on a more important role in their lives. They start to care about the community, and wonder if they might have a role in helping it. As they become more involved in the world of contesting, they start to look for concrete ways to contribute something back to the sport. Fortunately, there are many avenues available to those with the volunteer spirit.

Operating

The simplest (and perhaps most enjoyable) way to contribute to contesting is to simply get on the air and make QSOs during a contest. Contest operators like nothing more than to have more stations to work. Getting on the air and making QSOs makes the contest more fun for everyone involved. It's truly a "more the merrier" situation. By getting on the air and operating, you will not only bring more joy to the operators, you will also be contributing to the contest itself. Contest sponsors like nothing more than to see their participation increase. It also helps the contest sponsor a great deal when you submit your log. Your log submission helps to build the database of active stations in the contest. Your log provides the contest sponsors with a very important set of data which they can use during the log-checking process. By operating and submitting your log, you not only increase your chances of winning an award, but you are also increasing the fairness of contest adjudication. That's what I call a win-win situation.

Clubs and Organizations

Joining a contest club is a great way to get involved in the community of contesting. In the last issue, we discussed how to start a contest club if there is not one available in your area. Joining a contest club can provide many opportunities for giving back. Most clubs have several duties that need to be performed. Be one of the 20% who steps up to the plate and helps to get the grunt work done. Becoming part of a contest club will also expose you to other aspects of the contesting community. It's a great way to learn about other opportunities to contribute. Every club needs a "cheerleader." Pick your favorite contest, and try to drum up some activity as the date nears.

Elmering/Mentoring

Probably one of the most important roles you can serve is a mentor. If it were not for the consistent encouragement and help from AA4NU in my early days, I would probably not be an avid contest operator. Introducing folks to the contesting sport helps to ensure the future of contesting perhaps more than anything else you can do. New contest operators can be old or young, newly licensed or QCWA member. Find someone and share your enthusiasm. It's contagious, and you might even make a lifelong friend or two. You can also help out the new op with technical advice, station improvements, and loaning or donating equipment.

Sponsoring and Managing Awards

Most contests have some type of award system, whether it is certificates, plaques, or tasty treats from the sponsor's local area. Someone has to create and distribute these awards, and the work involved can be considerable. Unsung heroes like W5GN took it upon themselves to

manage, print and distribute awards to hundreds of recipients. There is a considerable amount of work involved in distributing awards, and any volunteer help is greatly appreciated. The certificates and plaques cost money, and someone needs to pay for them. Sponsoring a contesting award is a great way to give something back to contesting, and it can be done by individuals or clubs.

Managing a Contest

Many of the most successful contests are the result of great management. There is a lot of work to be done behind the scenes. Some of the tasks include design, organization, promotion, log collection (and re-typing, in some cases) log checking, results generation and publication, and awards management and distribution. The late K4OJ was simply unparalleled in his ability to promote the Florida QSO party. N6TW was recently inducted into the CQ Contest Hall of Fame in part for his countless hours spent tirelessly checking CQWW logs. There are many people working hard to make sure that the contests we love to operate exist year after year. Stay tuned for a future article from someone who manages a contest.

Field Day

I would be remiss to not mention Field Day, which is perhaps our greatest opportunity to expose the general ham radio community and the public to the experience of contest-style radio operating. Get out there and help operate the next FD. Share your enthusiasm for contesting with the folks around you. Many contest operators got their first taste of operating at Field Day. You never know what might be going on in the mind of the person watching you.

Hosting Guest Operations

If you enjoy building a station and don't mind letting someone else operate it, consider hosting a guest operation. Whether a single or multi operation, you can provide new contest operators the thrill of actually having answers to their CQ-CONTEST calls. Some contesters prefer the challenge of building a "bullet-proof" station for others to operate, and find the station design and construction even more fulfilling than operating it themselves. Some of my most enjoyable experiences in contesting have been as a guest at multi-ops, and I'm grateful to the hosts who made it possible.

Writing Software

Many of the latest innovations in the ham radio contesting world have come from software programmers. From real-time logging software to log checking analysis software, there have been great contributions from code jockeys world-wide. The efforts of K1EA, K8CC, N6TR, N1MM and countless others have made contesting more fun, and greatly reduced the amount of paperwork (in most cases to zero) after the contest is over. The log-checking wizards like N6AA, N6TW, N6TR and N5KO have made tremendous efforts to reward the most skillful and accurate operators. We also are lucky to have folks like K7EL and VE3NEA breaking new ground with software to help us design antennas and analyze propagation possibilities.

Sharing Information

There are lots of ways to contribute to contesting through sharing information. With the advent of the Internet, the possibilities are limited only by your imagination. The written word is one way to share info with your fellow ops. Ask any contest newsletter editor - there is always a need for contributions from writers. You can contribute articles to your local club newsletter, one of the contesting web sites, or even the National Contest Journal or other major ham radio magazines.

Other ways to share information include giving presentations at hamfests, manning a booth for your club, handing out fliers, or running a web site of your own. I am continually amazed at the creativity displayed on some contest operator's personal web pages. Some contesters like AA5AU have created entire sites devoted to helping others to maximize performance during RTTY contests. Others like CT1BOH have compiled scores and records from the CQWW contest, and presented the data in a unique historical format. Many folks are working behind the scenes entering past results and compiling historical records for various contests. Some of these tasks are too large for a single individual to handle. Ask around, and see if anyone could use your help entering data. Perhaps you have some special skills which you could apply to creating or maintaining a database of scores or records. The Potomac Valley Radio Club has conducted a series of "webinars" devoted to contest operating. (These webinars are now hosted by the World Wide Radio Operators Foundation.) WA7BNM and N7WA deserve special mention for their efforts providing contesting calendars and the 3830 score reporting web sites.

Spread the Word

Finally, try to present contesting in a positive light, especially when interacting with the public. This includes discussions on open public email lists. While it's easy to find the problems with any activity and pick them apart endlessly, it takes a little more effort to share the positive aspects. Problems need to be discussed and solutions sought, but try not to forget how your comments might appear to a newcomer to contesting. Competition brings out a lot of strong feelings. Try to share your joy and enthusiasm as much as possible, and keep the complaining to a minimum. Remember that everyone has had tough times behind the mic or key, but there is enough fun to keep us coming back for more. Keep the focus on the fun, and others will be drawn to your enthusiasm.

That's all for this installment. See you on the bands, and don't forget to submit your log to the sponsor, no matter how many QSOs you made. Your log submission improves the potential log checking potential accuracy, and will also allow you to receive a log checking report. Please send any questions or comments to me at k4ro@k4ro.net. **73**