

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

- [Buy Apple Final Cut Studio 3 MAC \(en\)](#)
- [Download GraphiSoft ArchiCAD 14 \(64-bit\)](#)
- [Buy Acronis True Image Home 2010 \(en,fr,de,es\)](#)
- [9.95\\$ Lynda.com - Up and Running with Evernote for Windows cheap oem](#)
- [Discount - Siemens Solid Edge ST6 \(64-bit\)](#)
- [Buy OEM Adobe Flash Builder 4.5 Premium](#)
- [Download Microsoft Office 2010 Professional Plus with SP1 \(32-bit & 64-bit\)](#)
- [Discount - Autodesk 3ds Max Entertainment Creation Suite Premium 2012 \(32-bit\)](#)
- [29.95\\$ Apple Mac OS X 10.7 Lion cheap oem](#)
- [259.95\\$ Autodesk Autocad Electrical 2009 cheap oem](#)
- [Buy The Adobe Photoshop CS4 Book for Digital Photographers \(en\)](#)
- [Buy OEM Avid Media Composer 2.8](#)



When the National Weather Service issued a Particularly Dangerous Situation tornado watch on May 25 last year, Terry Swails was in an unusual position: He could chase the storm - and not via a radar from the confines of a television newsroom.

He was in Iowa City that Sunday, coming home from a storm-chasing trip in Kansas during which he saw three tornadoes.

That Sunday storm produced the EF5 tornado that hit Parkersburg, Iowa - the strongest tornado in the state since 1968.

His wife Carolyn dissuaded him from chasing it - she'd had enough of storms - but for the first time in nearly three decades, Swails has been able to indulge his love of weather directly instead of through the technology of a television station. "When the storms came, I had to work," Swails said last week. "I was always inside."

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

On Monday, Swails returns to the airwaves after an 18-month absence, doing weather on WQAD's 6 p.m. weekday newscasts. It's a part-time gig, meaning that Swails can devote more time to the actual weather and to his Web site.

For WQAD, this is a bold partnership that will almost certainly erode KWQC's local-news dominance and could start a sea change. Channel 8 will allow Swails to directly promote TerrySwails.com on the air, and in exchange it will get the Quad Cities' most recognizable weather personality.

"Weather sells," Swails said. "People need it, want it, and it's always changing."

WQAD President and General Manager Larry Rosmilso said the Swails move is the most visible component of the station's aggressive news strategy. In the past six months, he said, WQAD has "really ramped up our news coverage" in an effort to transcend its reputation as the news station for the Illinois side of the Mississippi.

If a station has a better product, he said, the challenge is getting the audience to *try you* - which is where Swails comes in. In addition to Swails, WQAD hired Chris Williams after he was let go by KWQC in its early-2008 staff purge.

"People become very familiar with faces, and they feel comfortable with them, and when they leave, that's the opportunity to garner their viewership ... ," Rosmilso said. "I like to take advantage of opportunities that are offered."

But Rosmilso admitted that television audiences move slowly, so it will take some time to determine whether the station's strategy is working. KWQC news is a habit handed down from generation to generation, he conceded, but he was downright boastful about WQAD's chances. "Oh, it can be broken," he said. "It isn't going to be done in weeks or months, but it will get done."

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

Swails laughed when asked whether KWQC is in a position of weakness. "I think they're very vulnerable," he said.

The Business End

"Vulnerable" might be an understatement. KWQC is part of a company in bankruptcy, and the station could have a new owner later this month.

When KWQC decided in January 2008 not to exercise an option on Swails' contract, it was part of larger staff and salary cuts. In February 2008, the station eliminated two newscasts and a dozen employees.

But the highest-profile cut was Swails, who had spent more than 20 years at the station. Swails said that when he was told his option wasn't being picked up, he wasn't given the chance to go on the air or say goodbye to his fans.

"To this day I'm very miffed about it, very surprised," he said. "We knew financially that station was in trouble. ... I still thought I had put enough time in and had enough value that I was going to make it through."

In retrospect, Swails said, he recognizes the convergence of circumstances: an employer wanting to cut costs, his large salary, and his contract-option deadline.

But he said that KWQC owner Young Broadcasting was being shortsighted. "There's no local ownership," he said. "There's nobody ... who truly understands the value of the people that are there. They don't even know your name. You're just that little number there. 'Ooh, there's a nice big salary there.'" (He declined to say on the record what he was making at the station.)

The company had burdened itself with debt. In 1999 it acquired KRON in San Francisco (and its sister cable station) for \$823 million. Last year, Young began shopping the station and was

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

expected to take a heavy loss on any sale, but it couldn't find a suitable buyer.

In January, Young skipped a \$6-million debt payment, and its stock was de-listed from the NASDAQ exchange.

"Our company generates significant profits, but those profits are not sufficient to support all of our debt," wrote company Chair Vincent Young in a February letter to employees announcing the company's Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing. The company owns 10 stations, which are scheduled to be auctioned July 14.

"The bankruptcy's hanging over everybody's heads," said Swails, who said that he has friends who are still employed by KWQC. "Things are just kind of on-hold there. And everybody that works there is very concerned about that situation."

From a ratings perspective, KWQC's sovereignty might already be slipping. In the 6 p.m. local-news time slot, its share (the percentage of television sets in use that are tuned to the station) dropped from 36 to 30 from February 2008 to May 2009. (WQAD dropped from 13 to 12.) At 10 p.m. over the same period, KWQC's share dropped from 38 to 34, while WQAD grew from 17 to 18.

Rosmilso said that KWQC's ratings have dropped "not substantially but noticeably."

All of which makes this is a golden opportunity for KWQC's competitors - one that WQAD has taken advantage of.

But while pursuing Swails was a no-brainer if a station had enough resources and the drive to challenge KWQC, landing him proved to be difficult.

Chasing Swails

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

Swails has been absent from local airwaves since he was let go from KWQC, but he stayed in the area. (He and his family live in Port Byron.) He had a one-year non-compete clause that prevented him from working in the Quad Cities television market, and he used the time to pursue a number of projects.



He and his wife, Carolyn Wettstone, wrote the book *Un-Natural Disasters: Eastern Iowa's EF-5 Tornado & the Historic Floods of 2008* (released in November), and in February 2009 he launched TerrySwails.com - through which he provides written and video forecasts and commentary. (The *River Cities' Reader* 's sister company manages advertising for TerrySwails.com.)

The book had its source in that May 25 storm and the June floods that did so much damage to the Iowa City and Cedar Rapids area. Swails handled the meteorological aspects, while Wettstone told the stories of people affected by the floods.

Waterloo's KWWL - at which Swails got his television start in 1977 - bought 5,000 copies at the outset, and Swails said he's sold several thousand additional copies.

"Right now we're kind of the authority on this," he said of the tornado and floods.

And he's parlayed that into a side business, for instance speaking to a statewide insurance group in Des Moines in November.

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

TerrySwails.com was slower to develop. Bob McIlwain - who was, as a partner in National Publisher Services, an early investor in the Quad Cities-based Daytrotter.com music site - contacted Swails in the fall about starting a local-weather Web site.

The pitch, McIlwain said, was to "take the entrepreneurial-spirit approach and put more control in his hands than just going back to work for another local affiliate or even out of market."

"That's when I seriously decided that I wanted to get out of television, and that I wanted to put my emphasis on the Web site," Swails said.

So when WQAD approached Swails about joining its weather team (with Neil Kastor's retirement on the horizon), he turned the station down. About a month later, Swails said, the station called back to ask him to do a weekly weather segment. Swails then suggested that he work one newscast five days a week, both he and Rosmilso said.

"There's value in being on there every single night," Swails said, and in being able to promote his Web site.

Swails is being compensated, although neither he nor Rosmilso would say how much. Swails called it "minimal."

"It's more than money," Rosmilso said. "It's exposure on the station. We are giving up airtime to promote his Web site as part of the deal."

He added that he's not concerned that WQAD newscasts will be sending people to Swails' Web site rather than WQAD's. "There's more than enough out there to satisfy both what Terry wants and what we want," he said.

"It's not a pie where everybody's wrestling for a piece of it," McIlwain said. "It's an expanding pie."

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

Beyond Swails' reticence, there were also some internal politics to consider. Kastor's April retirement left the spot of chief meteorologist open, and on June 3 WQAD promoted James Zahara - who has been with the station for 17 years - into that slot. Bringing Swails into the situation had the potential to be sticky.

Zahara said he was consulted about adding Swails to the team. He said he was initially a little upset - "at first maybe, because I wasn't really truly informed what the plan was" - but he warmed quickly to the idea. "When you have an opportunity to have ... a weather icon in this area to actually work *for* you, I think it's a major plus," he said. "When all the pieces were put to me, I thought, 'This is actually going to be an awesome combination to have on the evening show.'"

Swails said that Zahara had "earned the right" to be the station's chief meteorologist. "If he was not treated properly, and didn't get his just due, and they took me and threw me in there ... I think there would have been some bitterness involved," he said. "They were very clear that Jim was their guy, and I was very clear that I felt that it was important ... that he was treated with the kind of respect that he deserved."

And as Swails said, both meteorologists stand to benefit. "The goal is ... to grow that station, to help them become the dominant weather presence in this market, ... and to get them number one," he said. "If that's the case, we'll both come out a whole lot better." If WQAD gains a single ratings point, Swails said, that would represent \$700,000 in additional advertising revenue per year.

"James and [meteorologist] Anthony [Peoples] recognize that Terry is a very popular on-air personality," Rosmilso said. "Terry's value to us is not his ability to provide us with a better forecast, a more accurate forecast, what have you. What Terry provides to us is name recognition. And along with name recognition comes popularity. ... People who always watched him on [Channel] 6 and enjoyed him will hopefully follow him over to WQAD and watch him here. More viewers to us means more revenue in terms of advertisers."

Human Intervention

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

Although Swails talks up the accuracy of his forecasting - "The proof is in the pudding of the following that I've been able to establish around here," he said - he also admits that personality plays a major role in the appeal of TerrySwails.com.

"If you can actually perform, that's a huge plus," he said. "That's what takes you to a different level."

The biggest plus, of course, is the brand that Swails established in more than 23 years at KWQC. TerrySwails.com has nearly 3,000 e-mail subscribers and generated 8,000 unique visitors and 70,000 impressions in June. Swails said that since the WQAD announcement June 10, he has been getting 20,000 impressions a week. "The numbers are growing and we haven't really gotten on the air to promote it yet," he said.

"I think the traffic is phenomenal given that it's really barely launched," said McIlwain.

Swails said that within a year, he hopes to have 10,000 subscribers and 250,000 monthly impressions.

While Swails might not have the sophisticated storm-tracking tools at home that he would have working full-time at a television station, weather forecasting is more the art of interpreting widely available data. So working from home on a laptop - which is what Swails does - doesn't create a technology gap.

"We all have pretty much the same access to the same models and a lot of the same equipment," Swails said. "Everything I get - my weather models and all that - is free on the Internet."

But Swails emphasized that experience and knowledge *do* make a difference. If you interpret the information you see quickly and properly, "you can ... warn people [about a dangerous situation] faster than anybody," he said. And that "might make the difference" between life and death for some in the audience.

Written by Jeff Ignatius
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 06:08

Of course, that's mostly true in live television rather than the Web, where his competition will include Weather.com.

Here, Swails said, the human touch comes into play. "This is a local presence," he said. "There's a guy here who's been doing weather professionally for 32 years who knows this area like the back of his hand. ... I've got human intervention; they don't."

Swails is betting that he can win that battle in the Quad Cities. People want their weather information immediately, he said, and local news outlets aren't meeting that demand on the Web. And national sites such as Weather.com don't have any local presence.

Mcllwain said this new-media outlet is akin to "the old days of local media You're owned and operated in that market, and you're connected to that market."

Plus, Swails' site allows him to avoid what he said is his primary weakness as a weather forecaster.

"I'm not what I consider to be a natural on-air talent," he said. "It's always been a struggle for me to get that comfort level. I'm a weather guy. I like weather. I understand weather. TV for me is a means to an end. It's a way for me to make a living doing weather."