

# Stokes an early convert to power of television

A young Kerry Stokes glimpsed the future when he realised just how powerful the new medium of television could be.

**I**t might be tempting to suggest that the brief experience of being an installer of rooftop antennas during the birth of Channel 7 set Kerry Stokes on the path to owning his own network. It would not be entirely true, however.

The potential of the medium which now occupies so much of his business attention was not revealed to him until three years later when he paid for a television commercial to help his new real estate business. The telephone, he says, went wild.

He'd come to Perth in 1959 and celebrated his 19th birthday a month before television began. He'd wanted to become a radio technician but jobs were hard to find.

"I went to the CES (Commonwealth Employment Service) and they told me to go back east," he said. "But I didn't have the money for the fare." So he applied for a job advertised with electrical retailer Ron Shaw to install antennas instead. The money, he remembers, was so good that he gave up playing football.

"We had to install six a day," he said, "and we were paid £12 a week. There was a bonus for installing 10 which took it up to £15 a week, a target he and his offsider generally met. Naturally, their work involved a lot of climbing over roofs and hanging on to chimneys.

"People didn't like having cables on their walls and we had to try to get them down inside the cavity walls."

The aerials had to be installed with line of sight to the Bickley transmitter, he recalls. The city had "dead spots", including Cottesloe, and in those days the option to overcome them was limited. If you were in a dead spot, you stayed in a dead spot.

It became clear to him quickly that even the best installers of television aerials were earning £18 a week and he was more ambitious than that, so turned his attention to real

estate, initially as a salesman and later in partnership.

"Alan Bond was selling a subdivision called Lesmurdie Heights," he recalled, and was advertising on the new Channel 7.

"So I went out to the channel, paid a fee and arranged for newsreader Lloyd Lawson to read my advertisement." He had an easel and pictures on it of properties for sale and investment needed.

"The phones went wild and one of the callers was (sales manager) Brian Treasure, who was furious that I was using his newsreader for a commercial," Mr Stokes said.

After some robust debate, an agreement was reached which satisfied honour on both sides. More importantly, the power of TV had been demonstrated clearly to the young Mr Stokes.

The meeting between the two also was the start both of a long friendship and a long business association, in radio 96fm and as initial licence holders for the third commercial licence in Perth, Channel 10. It was Mr Treasure who, with others, introduced spot advertising to television, a piece of pragmatism later copied elsewhere in the country. Before that, sponsors needed to be found for whole programs (often soap manufacturers, hence the name soap operas for daytime serials) and in a small market like Perth, that was difficult.

Allowing small advertisers to buy "spots" made television accessible to everyone.

Fifty years later, Mr Stokes thinks that television remains a force of good — which is not to say that everything that appears on television is good.

"I was very much against the end of local ownership of TV stations," he said. "I think that what Seven has now is about as close to a local owner as it is possible to have these days.

"Community involvement is part of the package. But it is also good for business. One enhances the other. People expect things from Seven and we will continue to do our best to deliver.

"I was advised to get rid of Telethon — it was too expensive. But I promise it will never disappear under my watch. Now there is a third generation of kids giving their pocket money to Telethon."

That's so important, he thinks, in a world where charity is not always visible.

"Perth has always punched above its weight in producing very good people." Those who have moved to network positions, with Seven, Nine and Ten, include Tim Worner, David Mott at Ten and Len Downs and Michael Healy at Nine. Others who cut their teeth at TVW include national news gurus Peter Meakin and Ian Cook. 

