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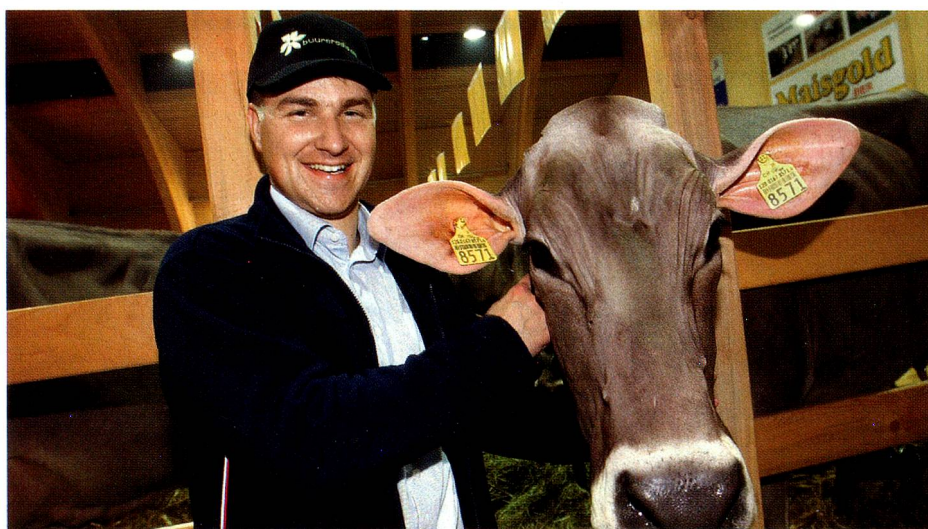
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Nostalgic tunes from a Swiss cow byre

When the Internet radio station buureradio.ch went „on the air“ in late December last year, the network overloaded just a few minutes into the broadcast. And the success goes on: Up to 20,000 listeners are registered every day, and guestbook entries show that buureradio.ch draws listeners from all over the world. By Peter Amstutz



Toni Brunner, Editor-in-Chief and Federal Councillor

„Buureradio? What's that?“ That's the all too frequent response if you ask Swiss about the latest and probably most unusual „radio station“ to start broadcasting in their country. This virtual station has been sending its programmes throughout the whole world via the Internet (www.buureradio.ch) since 28 December 2005: Traditional music, yodelling, folk, brass band and country sounds 24 hours a day, interspersed with approximately 20-minute talk shows (agricultural and market news, advice, federal politics, agricultural technology, Swiss wrestling, country kids, barn talk with „Buureradio“ founder, editor-in-chief and National Councillor Toni Brunner [see box] and a special guest) for both

urban and rural audiences. Broadcasts include up-to-date topics such as lonely hearts ads for farmers or tips from grandma's kitchen.

Thanks to sponsors and advertising organised by a volunteer editorial staff of two dozen working with an annual budget of CHF 500,000, more than a million broadband Internet users with an access line of at least 200 kbps (equivalent to ADSL) in Switzerland and around the globe can tune in to „buureradio.ch“ in CD quality. Financing for operation of the station has been secured for the first three years.

It had hardly even begun broadcasting when the first e-mails started arriving from excited

Swiss Abroad. Within just days of Swiss Radio International's final broadcast, „Nostalgic tunes from a Swiss cow byre“ quickly became an insider's tip among emigrants. The first well-wisher was from Ságúfalu, Hungary („Finally something down-to-earth from Switzerland“). Listeners in Holland, Thailand („It's great being so close to home when we're so far away“), India, Canada and Australia as well as Florida, Texas and Pennsylvania in the USA were the next to discover this excellent source of Swiss folk music. Within 48 hours, hundreds of compliments like „Huärä guät“ or „This is great“ started pouring in from every continent and piling up on Brunner's desk.

This down-to-earth musical programme is „made“ with the help of state-of-the-art Internet and streaming technology provided by Digital Media Distribution AG (DMD2) in Uetendorf near Thun. There, tens of thousands of tracks from every conceivable category are stored on music servers in top stereo quality. Of these, around 6,000 are folk music tracks specially digitalised for „buureradio.“ An average of 20,000 listeners receive the broadcasts every day, one in eight from abroad. The homepage features the latest news in text form. Despite the fact that it has no studio and broadcasts in online sessions, this radio station has obviously discovered a hole in the market. As Brunner says, „People are showing such an interest in us because traditional stations hardly ever broadcast anything folksy. We're overwhelmed!“ But Toni Brunner has merely turned a vision suggested by his father Johannes into a reality. A farmer from Toggenburg, his father missed listening to „traditional music with information“ while working in the byre. Apparently others did, too. Thanks to Internet radio, the national anthem plays at noon and church bells from home ring out at the stroke of midnight. The next day always starts off with „En gschäntä Tag“ by Adolf Stähli.

THE BRAINS BEHIND THE IDEA

■ SVP National Councillor Toni Brunner (32) of Ebnet-Kappel (SG), editor-in-chief and manager. As a young 21-year-old farmer, Toni Brunner moved into Berne's parliamentary building in 1995 as Switzerland's youngest MP. Working from his barn on the Hundsrücken, he presents his „Barn Talk“ show featuring special guests from town and country. „My aim is to have a lot of fun with buureradio.ch and put smiles on a great many faces.“

■ FDP National Councillor Peter

Weigelt (50) from St. Gallen, manager. This economic and communications advisor has been on the National Council for eleven years. Before that he served on St. Gallen's Municipal Council (1988-90) and Cantonal Council (1990-96).

■ Former SVP National Councillor Jakob Freund (60) from Bühler (AR), President of the Swiss Folk Music Association, is in charge of the folk music show. From 1995 to 2003 this down-to-earth member of parliament served on the National Council. His hobbies: surfing the Internet, playing the dulcimer, string music from

Appenzell, travel, sports and playing Jass.

■ Renzo Blumenthal (30) from Vella (GR), master farmer, presents the special request show. Blumenthal became an overnight celebrity on 30 April 2005 when he triumphed over 15 other candidates to win the title of Mister Switzerland. Together with his parents, Renzo manages an organic farm in Lugnez. He considers himself „natural and down-to-earth.“ The flip side: He loves pop and rock. His favourite city is Barcelona and his preferred holiday destinations are Rhodes and Cyprus

■ Tanja Gutmann (29) of Lucerne, trained SBB operations clerk and Miss Switzerland 1998, presents the special Swiss Abroad request show (requests can be made via www.buureradio.ch). As an actress, model and presenter, Tanja Gutmann leads a relatively chaotic life divided between Switzerland and Germany. And could this social education worker, trained actress and speaker of five languages imagine a future at Buureradio? „My grandparents and my father were farmers, plus I spent the first ten years of my life on a farm,“ is Tanja's explanation for this affinity.