National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

Marlboro Novelty Radio



Transistor novelty radios are usually inexpensive and fun to collect. They come in hundreds of styles, depicting commercial products as well as popular culture images. Often a company would purchase such radios in large quantities and sell them cheap (or give them away with a small purchase) as effective advertising. For example, in the 1960s, several oil companies offered transistor radios designed to look like one of their gas pumps. You might see an ad saying something like: “Fill your tank with 15 gallons or more of Sunoco gasoline and get a transistor radio for only $1.”

While there were a few tube-type novelty radios based on consumer products, the genre really proliferated when small, inexpensive made-in-Asia transistor radios became available. The museum has an entire exhibit case devoted to novelty radios, plus many more in storage. Here is one recently added to our collection in the shape and size of a flip-top pack of cigarettes.

Today there is no cigarette advertising on television, but a few decades ago the rugged looking “Marlboro Man” on horseback was a ubiquitous presence on TV screens.

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!