# Article: National Broadcasting Company Inc

The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was the first permanent, full-service radio network in the U.S. The original owner of NBC was the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). RCA was formed after World War I by several large American companies in order to keep “wireless” (radio) technology in American hands. At the time, it was the leading manufacturer of radio receivers in the world.

RCA’s goal in forming NBC was to be able to provide a large number of quality radio programs so that, as one of its newspaper ads said, “every event of national importance may be broadcast widely throughout the United States.” General Electric and Westinghouse also had ownership interests in NBC, but RCA bought them out in January, 1930 and remained the sole owner until 1986, when General Electric acquired RCA for $6.3 billion. NBC is now a wholly-owned operating subsidiary of General Electric.

NBC’s first radio broadcast, on November 15, 1926, was a four-and-a-half hour presentation of the leading musical and comedy talent of the day. It was broadcast from New York over a network of 25 stations, as far west as Kansas City; close to half of the country’s five million radio homes tuned in. The first coast-to-coast broadcast soon followed, on New Year’s Day, 1927, when NBC covered the annual Rose Bowl football game in California.

The demand for a network service among local stations was mounting so rapidly that less than two months after its first national broadcast, NBC split its programming into two separate networks, called the “red” and the “blue” networks, to give listeners a choice of different program formats. By 1941, these two networks blanketed the country; there were 103 blue subscribing stations, 76 red, and 64 supplementary stations using NBC programs. The blue network provided mostly cultural offerings: music, drama, and commentary. The red featured comedy and similar types of entertainment. There were regular radio programs for children, and soap operas and religious programs. When the Federal Communications Commission declared in 1941 that no organization could own more than one network, NBC sold the blue complex, which became the American Broadcasting Company.

Early radio provided a forum for the popular vaudeville entertainers of the day: NBC hired many of them—Rudy Vallee, Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Ed Wynn, Eddie Cantor, Al Johnson, Groucho Marx, Bob Hope, Jimmy Durante, Bing Crosby, Red Skelton, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, and George Burns and Gracie Allen, to name a few. These performers had their own shows and appeared on each others’ as well.

From the first coast-to-coast broadcast of the Rose Bowl in 1927, sporting events were a radio mainstay. That same year, the red and blue networks tied in with a number of independent stations to broadcast the second Tunney-Dempsey fight from Soldier Field in Chicago. Two years later NBC broadcast the Kentucky Derby. During the 1920s and 1930s, the network featured the World Series many times. It also covered major football games, golf tournaments, and the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1932.

NBC’s first special-events broadcast was Charles A. Lindbergh’s arrival in Washington on June 11, 1927 after his historic trans-Atlantic flight. In 1928, the network began coverage of national political events, covering the Republican and Democratic national conventions in 1928; the inaugurations of presidents Herbert Hoover in 1929 and Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933; the opening of the 73rd Congress on March 9, 1933; and Roosevelt’s first “Fireside Chat” on March 12 of that year. “NBC News” was officially created in 1933.

The first international NBC broadcast was also in 1928, when the network carried a pick-up of President Calvin Coolidge opening a Pan-American conference in Havana.

RCA engineers began actively conducting television experiments in 1925, but it was not until 1939 that NBC began what is considered the first regular television service, with a telecast of President Roosevelt opening the New York World’s Fair. The first television network broadcast occurred on January 11, 1940 when programming was transmitted from RCA’s WNBT-TV New York City to General Electric’s WRGT-TV Schenectady, New York, via automatic radio relays.

In 1941, NBC obtained a commercial television station license from the Federal Communication Commission for WNBT-TV and officially became the world’s first commercial television station.

"[National Broadcasting Company Inc.](http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2840600063.html)" International Directory of Company Histories. 1990. *Encyclopedia.com.* 4 Jul. 2016 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.