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Alan Jones

'Waves of fury': the backlash that led advertisers to desert Alan Jones

The king of talkback radio is on shaky ground after his Jacinda Ardern comments, with 2GB warning this is his last chance



▲ 2GB broadcaster Alan Jones has survived numerous controversies – but this time it's different. Photograph: Glenn Hunt/AAP



Amanda Meade

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665

On Sunday [Alan Jones](#) sat down and wrote a lengthy, angry email to the chairman of Macquarie Media, Russell Tate, about Tate's decision to publicly humiliate him on Saturday.

Jones was incensed Tate had threatened to sack him if he made any more offensive comments on his popular morning show on Sydney's 2GB and Brisbane's 4BC. Last week Jones suggested Scott Morrison should "shove a sock down the throat" of the New Zealand prime minister, [Jacinda Ardern](#), and that she should be "backhanded".

John Singleton, the Macquarie Media investor who poached Jones from rival station 2UE back in 2002, was also copied into the email. Singleton is an old friend of Jones and has said the 78-year-old presenter made 2GB successful – and 2GB in turn made Jones a very rich man.



Alan Jones told he will be sacked if he makes more offensive comments on radio

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Whatever Jones did for 2GB in the past it wasn't enough to stop Tate warning him the next misstep would be his last. Advertisers were leaving, revenue was falling and Tate had had enough.

On Thursday the Nine CEO, Hugh Marks, who had just offered \$113.94m to acquire the remaining shares in Macquarie Media, also signalled Jones was on thin ice when he said the company can survive without him.

"There's a bunch of talented people there and, remember, Alan's breakfast program in Sydney ... would be less than 10% of Macquarie Media [total revenue], let alone the revenue position of Nine," Marks said at the results presentation.

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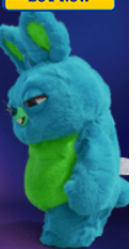
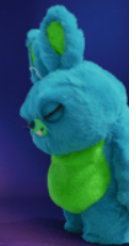
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the results presentation.

“Alan’s a good broadcaster, Macquarie have made plenty of comments about their relationship and recent events so I won’t go into that but yes, of course, that business can survive the loss of any of its talent.”

“They’re asking themselves is this something we want to be associated with?”
Marketing consultant Darren Wooley

Jones has survived numerous controversies, including cash for comment on 2UE in 1999 and the attacks on Julia Gillard in 2012. The broadcaster said the then prime minister should be “shoved in a chaff bag” and later that **her father had died “of shame”** because she “told lies every time she stood for parliament”.

It’s not the first time advertisers have pulled out and history has shown most of them drift back.

This time is different. The impact on advertising across Macquarie Media’s stations has been serious and sources say the shows and the staff are all reeling, and sales reps are losing commission. Figures from ad tracking service AirCheck reveal that **2GB lost 441 ad spots** over the first three days of this week. More than 50 companies have stated publicly that they have pulled out of Jones, and even 2GB or Macquarie generally.

A look at the run-down of ads from before the Ardern comments to after show that the top nine advertisers who had spots on Jones’ breakfast show two weeks ago had none this week. For example SpecSavers, went from 13 ads to none. Across the station the picture was the same. Nissan Australia went from 35 spots to none and Koala Mattresses went from 33 to none, **according to AirCheck** documents seen by Guardian Australia.



Alan Jones says advertisers who leave his program will be replaced by others

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The CEO of marketing management consultancy TrinityP3, **Darren Wooley**, says advertisers are pulling out after being bombarded by posts on their social media pages.

“They’re listening to the outrage; they’re looking at their reputation; they’re looking at the media coverage and asking themselves is this something we want to be associated with?”

“Smart advertisers worry about the environment their ads appear in,” Wooley says. “In a social media world brands are much more attuned to what is happening with the public. Consumer backlash will definitely have an influence and that will influence the media coverage.”

Wooley says the social media groups are providing structure which gives individuals a voice. “It’s very hard to organise the outrage unless the outrage is already there,” he says.



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While Sleeping Giants, an anonymous group, is well known for campaigning on Twitter, largely against Sky News, a Facebook group called Mad Fucking Witches has been highly effective in campaigning against Jones in the past week.

The Witches convenor, Jennie Hill, said her members are 75% women, 25% men and are motivated by climate change, violence against women and structural problems like racism.

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“The campaign began with a single post we published last week on what Jones said, and now the other admins and I feel we’re just surfing the waves of fury,” Hill said.

“There are other activists involved, for sure, but the biggest effort is clearly coming from our 56,000 followers or witches. I know this because with every sponsor withdrawal the page gets hundreds (sometimes thousands) of messages advising us of it within minutes, which proves the huge, angry



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numbers of people putting enormous effort into expressing what they feel to the companies involved.”

The Tate statement was such a slap in the face for the veteran shock jock, some speculated he may not even turn up to work on Monday.

“Notwithstanding his apologies, I have today discussed the matter with Alan and advised him that any recurrence of commentary of this nature will result in the termination of his contract,” **Tate said in the media statement** issued on Saturday night.



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He did turn up but not before telling Tate that he made 2GB and how dare they threaten him so publicly. It was less a mea culpa and more of a woe is me. The message was that he worked really hard while others “waltzed the corridors being unproductive”, a 2GB source said.

It may have been worse for Jones if Tate had known Jones said Ardern should be “backhanded”. But he didn’t know until the audio was played on ABC TV’s Media Watch on

Monday night.

On Tuesday Jones was still defiant, **telling Nine News that he was the victim** because of the “vile” attacks on him on social media.

He also claimed advertisers who chose to abandon his program, and there were at least 20 by then, would simply be replaced by others.

“I’ve got no comment about the advertisers, they can make their own judgment if they go,” he said. “There will be others that take their place.”

“I feel we’re just surfing the waves of fury
Mad Fucking Witches’ Jennie Hill

The backlash from advertisers, although significant, was not the only trigger for Tate to threaten to tear up Jones’s contract. The king of talkback radio has been on shaky ground with management since **losing a major defamation case** brought by the Toowoomba-based Wagner family last year.

Justice Peter Flanagan found Jones was repeatedly “wilfully blind to the truth” when he made “vicious and spiteful” comments about the family and ordered Jones, 2GB and 4BC to pay \$3.4m in damages for defaming John, Denis, Neill and Joe Wagner, plus interest estimated to be about \$300,000.

Behind the scenes Jones’s on-air tirades have brought legal action which is never made public, but quietly settled by Macquarie lawyers. He is almost uninsurable now.

There was a long delay in signing Jones to his current two-year contract, which runs until July 2021, largely because of the huge cost of defending him from defamation claims, not to mention the litany of apologies he’s had to make to everyone from Ardern to Malcolm Turnbull for **calling him a traitor** and the chief executive of the Sydney Opera House, Louise Herron, for **berating her on air**.

After months of tense negotiations during which the Macquarie chief executive, Adam Lang, tried to get tough new conditions into Jones’s contract to prevent a recurrence of all the problems, **Macquarie agreed to sign Jones** again in May largely on the insistence of the Nine chairman, Peter Costello.

But not three months into the new deal the 78 year old has brought disrepute on the station again.

Less cash after comments: advertisers sock it to Alan Jones after Ardern controversy
Amanda Meade



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The companies which have protested include RSL Art Unions, Bing Lee, Snooze, Bunnings, Volkswagen, Koala Mattresses, Anytime Fitness, Total Tools, AVEO, Lowes, Chemist Warehouse, Red Cross, OMG Mattresses, Hyundai, Sleeping Duck and Scali.

A spokeswoman for Big W said the company was withdrawing its ads from Jones and 2GB permanently “due to recent comments made on 2GB”.

Similarly, Mercedes-Benz Australia and ME Bank won’t be returning.

“ME is a values-led organisation with a long history and culture of fairness and respect,” the bank said.

“Our employees, customers and wider community have a reasonable expectation we’ll continue to maintain and defend those principles.

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“Alan Jones’ comments last week about Jacinda Ardern were not in keeping, and we acted in accordance with our corporate conscience.

“We won’t be advertising on the Alan Jones show ever again.”

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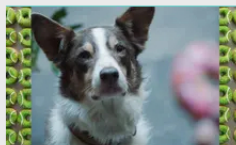
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