DIGITAL RADIO SUMMIT 2021 EVENT SUMMARY

17 February 2021

Presentations and videos:
https://tech.ebu.ch/events/drs2021

Disclaimer: This report is intended as a quick overview of the event. Before quoting any of the speakers we recommend that you refer to the original presentation and check with the speakers themselves.

Welcome to the Digital Radio Summit 2021

Antonio Arcidiacono (EBU)

Radio will continue to be successful only if we continue to innovate. Connected cars are one key area, where the growing adoption of Android Automotive is likely to create important economies of scale.

Many of the new trends in radio are linked to the ability to store information locally. This has an impact both in terms of applications (with the growth of podcasts) and in distribution, making possible the seamless combination of live, push multicast, and unicast content without knowing where it's coming from.

On the content side, the emergence of the Clubhouse app is evidence of the growth of social experiences, possibly leading to more mash-ups of linear broadcast with collective experiences that listeners can select from. Object-oriented production will be a key enabler here.

Radio-Canada Ohdio: Live and On-Demand Distribution

Pascale Lacroix-Vézina, Natacha Mercure (Radio-Canada)

Radio-Canada's digital distribution strategy for both live and on-demand content is primarily focused on drawing people into its own **Oh**dio app. This represents a change of focus from the earlier "hyper-distribution" approach, where content was much more widely available but was being indexed and even monetized by external platforms. Today they focus first on their own app, followed by partner platforms where they have agreements in place (e.g. TuneIn, SiriusXM, Radioplayer). They are increasingly limiting availability of content outside these contexts. They've also found that the maintenance involved in custom skills for smart speakers was prohibitive and they now focus only on flash briefings.

Just over a year after launching **Oh**dio, they have seen strong increases in content consumption on the app: 40% to 75% increase in consumption of live content and 135% to 200% increase for on-demand content and podcasts.

## Digital strategies at iHeartMedia

John Vermeer (iHeartMedia)

An audio revolution is upon us with "audio meeting the moment". This comes from the continued scale and mass reach of broadcast radio (iHeart reaches 90% of Americans each month across its AM and FM stations), combined with an expanding digital distribution footprint (250+ platforms), the evolution of the automotive space, and the explosive growth of podcasts.

With the scale of their reach, broadcasters are uniquely positioned to drive podcast discovery. Using its audio-only marketing platforms, iHeartMedia has grown its podcast audience from 5.4M to 29M in just over 2 years.

COVID-19 led to consumers seeking new ways to consume audio programming, accelerating trends that were already present: 44% increase in listening over smart TVs, plus smaller increases on game consoles, smart speakers and web.

Strategically, the car remains the most important category: it's impossible to understate the importance of the growth of the Android Automotive OS. It allows broadcasters to create more visually robust and personalized user experiences, merging local broadcast with artist radio and podcasts.

2. APPLICATION INNOVATIONS
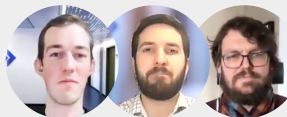
Future of Radio Apps: Reimagining SWR's radio, music & podcast offering
Daniel Freytag, Christian Hufnagel (SWR), Sebastian Weiß (Nacamar)

SWR has launched a new radio app that gives users the ability to time-shift, skip tracks (being presented with three alternatives) and listen to their favourite tracks on-demand. The system is made possible by enriching linear radio with live metadata and using a technology platform called Ybrid.

Ybrid delivers a personalized audio stream to each user, combining live and on-demand audio in a seamless way. The distributed signal is modified per listener, from the edge of the audio CDN. SWR's Radiohub, connected to Ybrid, is a central metadata platform to collect and distribute the metadata, also giving presenters visibility of the metadata in real-time.

Putting the required music licensing arrangements in place was complex – initially for a one-year trial period with all the usual reporting required.

Realtime radio recommendations
Sébastien Noir (EBU)

The EBU T&I team has been investigating the possibility of generating recommendations in real-time based on live content. The system uses a combination of the EBU PEACH recommendation ecosystem combined with the EBU EuroVOX toolbox for transcription and translation.

As demonstrated, a live HLS stream is transcribed by EuroVOX and groups of sentences are sent to PEACH, which then generates the recommendations. Over time it accumulates a timeline of recommendations related to the live content.

This work is designed to address the shift from traditional distribution to something more user-centric and personalized. It is about enriching live streams with added user value.
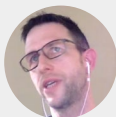
Radio applications for different audiences
Margot Masui (VRT)

VRT has begun working on a new approach to distributing its digital audio, currently at the research phase. The "north star" is to have a unified online VRT AUDIO platform that would bring together all audio content that VRT produces. It would be highly personalized and based on data and listener insights. The aim is to be better prepared for the shift from linear to on-demand listening with a user-first platform.

While this would be a major shift, in parallel VRT will continue to develop the five new radio branded apps that were launched in 2020. The latter, running on a common code base but individually branded, were designed to build the community feeling that comes from live radio, with increased interactivity and better visibility for on-demand audio.

Pushing the frontiers with Digital Radio Mondiale

Nigel Fry (BBC)

While the future of radio is certainly digital, about half of the world's population don't have access to digital services. DRM, which uses the MW, SW and VHF bands, has been adopted by India and Pakistan; South Africa will use it to serve rural audiences; and there's significant investment in China and tests in Russia and Indonesia.

Leveraging all of the advantages of DRM (including for sustainability, emergency warning, education) requires affordable and power-efficient receivers. The potential of the market in India has spurred on the technology development, with devices now on the 3rd or 4th generation. Cambridge Consultants and CML in the UK are working on a low-cost module packaged to allow easy adoption and local manufacture of radios. Aiming to come to market in Q3 2021 and priced below $10.

Radioplayer: Driving Radio into the future

Laurence Harrison, Ole Jurgen Torvmark (RadioPlayer)

Radioplayer, a non-profit owned by broadcasters, has the goal of ensuring radio's future and prominence in cars, helping radio stations retain control their own content and helping listeners to have the best user experience possible. Growth has continued, adding six countries in the past couple of years: Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Netherlands and France. It now offers metadata from more than 6,000 radio stations across 14 countries.

Quality metadata will remain key to the experience of radio in the car, helping to ensure there's a rich visual experience. As of April, fully licensed "now playing" artist images will be available in the Radioplayer API, partly driven by the larger dashboard screens now becoming the norm in electric cars. Work on the UX is also important: Radioplayer has been building a hybrid radio app to demonstrate what can be done in Android Automotive and help shape developments in that space.

The EBU Radio Production Group

Richard Courtice (BBC)

EBU Members are invited to join a new Radio Production group. The scope will stretch to systems for script-writing, scheduling (people, audio and things), real-time playout, non-linear publishing, programme metadata (including "music genealogy"), archiving, and branding and marketing.

The group will share experiences with such systems, look to the future on technical matters to do with audio, promote the adoption of R 128 Loudness, etc.

Join it here: https://tech.ebu.ch/as#radio-production
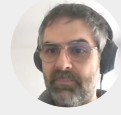
Norway, Sweden, Finland: a quick overview

David Fernandez Quijada (EBU Media Intelligence Service)

Norway, Sweden and Finland are similar radio markets in several ways, with a strong PSM operator alongside strong commercial operators. The leading radio stations have 30-45% market shares and the weekly reach of radio is around 80-90% but is slightly eroding in the last 5-6 years. All three are podcast consumption champions. There's a vast offer both in terms of catch-up radio and exclusive or online-first content.

They've taken very different approaches to digitization, with Norway having switched off FM and being a DAB+ champion, while Finland has entirely rejected DAB and is focused on IP distribution. Sweden is very slowly moving forward with DAB but also a champion with online radio.

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Digital diversity: different ways of reaching Nordic audiences

Marit Rossnes (NRK), Olli Sipilä (YLE) Christer Modig (NENT), Tomas Granryd (Swedish Radio)

NRK's future strategy is about ensuring that they are embracing the public service remit across the entirety of the offer: content, curation and product/platform. The aim is to bring the audience onto NRK's own platforms so that they are in control of the curation ("mixing broccoli and chocolate") and can ensure content integrity. People must know that content is coming from NRK – trust or awareness of the brand is effectively the basis of the business model.
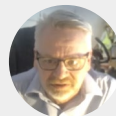
Yle is focused on IP-based distribution for audio. The strategy is to serve the Finnish people better using the mobile and IP networks. It comes from two things: firstly, what is best for society? Can you have a common network serving all of society's needs (media, healthcare, taxation, etc.) rather than multiple networks? And secondly, linear services are just a part of the portfolio – they also need to think about the best ways to distribute on-demand content.

The fact that the DAB roll-out has stalled in Sweden makes things difficult for commercial radio operators like **NENT Group**, as there are not enough channels per market on FM to make it financially viable. Without moving forward with DAB+ there's a risk that radio broadcasting is slowly going to diminish and commercial radio will not be attractive for advertisers. NENT has stepped back from podcast production until they can find a way to monetize podcasts effectively. Subscription VOD platforms have made people less tolerant of commercial interruptions.
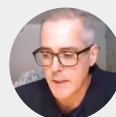
Swedish Radio launched its open API 15 years ago, to feed third-party platforms with its content. There were minimal rules and restrictions at that time, but as the environment has started to change, there is now a need to establish clearer ground rules. They have a new set of API rules including that material only be linked or streamed, not republished; there must be clear attribution to SR; it must be easy to find; and various requirements around monetization, marketing and user data.

Manifesto for an automotive user experience

Martin Koch (Audi; Chair of WorldDAB Automotive Working Group)

DAB+ now comes as standard in more than 50% of cars in Europe and is an option in just over 30% more. In the biggest markets DAB+ is in more than 80% of all new cars sold. But the challenge goes beyond putting DAB+ in cars.

The five key topics for creating a great radio user experience in the car. **1**: Cross-industry collaboration: the WorldDAB Automotive Group brings together broadcasters, car manufacturers and all parts of the service chain. **2**: Metadata campaign: clearly stating why metadata (logos, now playing, etc) is important and helping broadcasters to get it on air. **3**: User experience: developing UX guidelines to ensure there is a fun and consistent UI. **4**: Voice control: explaining how station names should be pronounced via phonemes. **5**: New technologies: broadcast and hybrid radio support in Android Automotive, and exploring how radio reception performs electric cars.

Radio France: Content in the Connected Car

Matthieu Beauval, Justine Gheeraert (Radio France)

Connected car systems are changing the rules of the game. There are three surfaces on which radio needs to ensure it retains its prominence: the dashboard, the voice assistant, and smartphones. Radio France is focused on having a holistic approach across those three surfaces and also on both new and older cars.

The Radio France application is compatible with the two main mirroring solutions, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Last year it was also made compatible with Android Automotive (which has been adopted by the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi group in France). Radio France has joined the Radioplayer France initiative as another means of helping to ensure prominence in future.

Radio France also sees immersive audio is a key asset for radio broadcasters to offer the car industry.

NAB PILOT's Android Automotive Initiative

John Clark (NAB), Steve Shultis (WNYC), Jaime Chaux (CRA), Gereon Joachim (Xperi), Joe D'Angelo (Xperi)

JC (NAB): PILOT is an NAB initiative focused on identifying the new media technology opportunities for local radio and TV broadcasters. As of autumn 2020, they have convened a global group to advocate for the proper support of broadcast radio – all of the standards – in Android Automotive. They want Google to build support into the open-source platform so that the functionality is available to all developers. Android Automotive is projected to be in 36 million vehicles in 2030.

GJ (Xperi): Among all sources available in cars, 81% are listening to radio. So if we don't have proper support for broadcast radio, that's a fail. Metadata is key. Radio needs to be competitive with online listening options.

JC (CRA): The FM chipset in mobile phones is a cautionary tale – the lack of a global voice and message meant it was just too complex for the manufacturers to integrate it. We need to avoid that for broadcast radio in Android Automotive.

JD'A (Xperi): If we don't get this right, it'll make the path to a tunerless radio much easier for audio makers to take. The industry is now speaking with one clear voice to Google and we've been able to get engagement from them. If this project is successful, it becomes the de facto open source solution for broadcast radio around the world.

SS (WNYC): For WNYC, there are three priorities for any platform: broadcast radio must be easy to locate in the car; the audio experience must be second to none, including the blend from digital to analogue; and the metadata and graphics must be clearly displayed and used on the backend also.

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SHAPING RADIO'S MULTIPLATFORM FUTURE

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