

Radio Broadcasting Update

By Dave Thorpe G4FKI

John G8DZH, recently asked me to give an update on the latest developments in radio broadcasting.

DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting)

DAB has been around now for a number of years. Receivers were originally over £100 but can now be bought for as little as £15 for a basic model in high street stores. There are a variety on offer some with extras such as flash card memory, allowing air timed recordings, DAB walkman, DAB clock radios. The list is endless, just look at a recent Argos catalogue.

However, there are various problems within the industry. For example GCAP, who are part owners of the Digital One commercial national network, are currently trying to sell their share. Also, as of April 2008, they are in the process of closing down stations such as Jazz, and Planet Rock, if a buyer cannot be found.

Earlier in 2008 two other stations closed and have since been replaced. On top of all of this Channel Four Radio were due to launch a new National Multiplex in July 2008. This has been postponed, and as yet, a new date hasn't been set. There is still ongoing controversy with regards to the quantity of stations and the quality issue due to the restricted bandwidth.

On a positive side, however, the UK has by far the most DAB services, and also the most DAB radios. In total, DAB now accounts for 20% of all radio sales by volume, and 26% of all sales by value. And 82% of portable kitchen radio sales by value.

There still continues to be further expansion of new transmitters including for the first time a site on the Isle of Man, plus coverage of Whitby, Scarborough and Bridlington areas. After many years, the Bedford / Herts / Buckingham area will have its own local DAB service, plus other areas of the UK i.e. Northamptonshire and Surrey to name a few.

FM

Although there are no more local Independent radio stations being advertised from Ofcom, the low-powered Community Radio services are still being awarded and, as of Feb 08, there were one hundred on air with another sixty plus due on air in 2008/9.

There are a number of community stations in the Essex / Kent area:

London	104.4MHz	Resonance FM (Transmitter on top of Guys Hospital)
Isle of Sheppey	95.6MHz	BRFM
Bexley	103.7MHz	TGR FM
Brentwood	98.0MHz	Phoenix FM
Forest Gate	92.0MHz	Nusound Radio
Goodmayes	94.0MHz	Radio Ummah
Harold Hill	92.2MHz	Link FM
Burnham on Crouch / Maldon	94.7MHz	Saint FM

As of 28th March, Southend now has its own radio station on 105.1 (300w) with studios based on the seafront (www.southendradio.com)





Southend Radio new Building

Plus there is a Medium wave low power community station planned for Harlow in 2008.

For a full list, check the Ofcom website

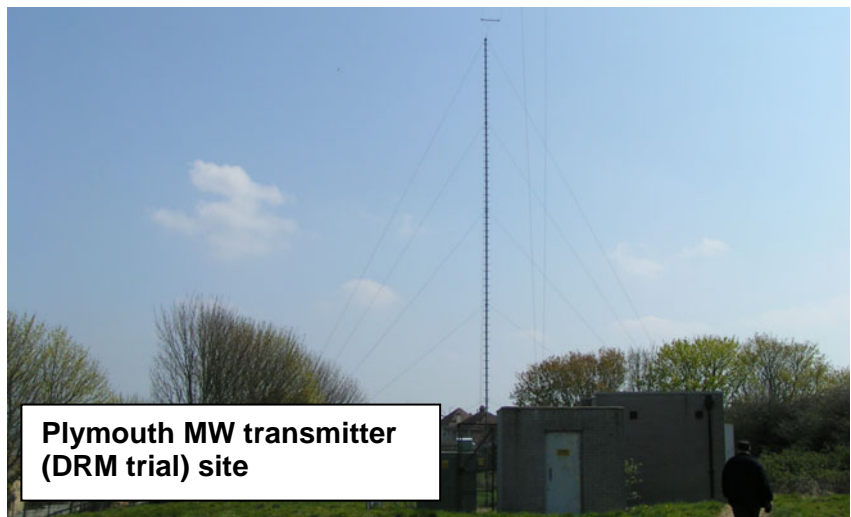
www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/community-main.html

DRM (Digital Radio Mondial)

This mode of transmission has been around for a number of years, around the world a number of short wave International Broadcasting stations are using DRM as well as AM transmission, at present there are only around two or three domestic radios available. May RadCom has a review of the Morphy Richards 27024 AM / FM / DAB / DRM radio by Giles G1MFG. Pricewise, they are still over £100 and tend to be mains only. They are only available mail order and not on the high street.

In the UK the BBC have been experimenting in Plymouth with a DRM trial using transmitters of BBC Radio Devon, and have placed a number of radios in houses in the Plymouth area, and are continually getting feedback.

As of yet, the results have not been published, but there is talk of in the years to come that DRM may replace AM medium wave radio.



Plymouth MW transmitter (DRM trial) site

This would be a major decision if it happened as most transmitters would have to be replaced, the public would have to buy another radio, and exactly what service would go on DRM? Bearing in mind most services are already available on FM / DAB / Sky and online.

Internet Radio

There are now a number of Internet Radio's becoming available, these use the signal from your wireless router or your computer system to operate as a standalone radio.

The advantage of these radio's is that they allow access to many thousands of radio stations across the world, and also include other audio streams from American police forces, and even the GB3PZ repeater in Manchester.

It is also possible to listen to your own audio collection from your home PC via the internet radio, and also pre-recorded BBC programmes. Prices start at around £40 (LOGIK) up to top of the range £200 models, they are available in PC World / Currys and Argos.



Logik IR100

I have been listening to a variety of stations, the quality does vary a great deal, but the choice and ease of operation could well make this a useful gadget. These suffer a similar problem of early DAB radios i.e. they tend to be mains only, and the general public may decide that radio is not the future, and look more for other methods to listen to music / entertainment such as YouTube, iPod's etc. Only time will tell.

73

Dave G4FKI
E-mail: g4fki@lefars.org.uk