

12 October 2007

Australian radio showcases multimedia service on a mobile phone

See, hear, vote and shop with digital radio

Australian commercial radio broadcasters today unveiled what the future of radio might look like – a digital radio-enabled mobile phone that allows users to view, navigate and store visual content such as images and slides broadcast by radio stations.

The handset features the “Visual DAB/DAB+” mobile application that can be used to deliver visual information such as artist and track details, news headlines, weather and competitions. It was developed by Cambridge-based The Technology Partnership (TTP), with broadcast software developed by All In Media (AIM), in collaboration with Australian radio broadcasters.

Building digital radio data services into mobile phones opens up opportunities in the future for a range of interactive services such as competitions, music charts, shopping, voting and user generated content, as well as revenue opportunities through special offers and electronic coupons.

“Australian radio broadcasters are committed to getting digital radio and its exciting multimedia features into mobile phones. By working with TTP and All In Media we’ll now be able to demonstrate some of the exciting possibilities that digital radio is capable of bringing to hand sets when digital radio is officially launched,” said Joan Warner, chief executive officer of Commercial Radio Australia.

Ms Warner said Commercial Radio Australia had taken delivery of a number of the phones and would be seeking meetings with the major telecoms to discuss the opportunities. A consumer trial of the service is planned in 2008.

The Federal Government has set an official start date of 1 January 2009 for digital radio in Australia, allowing national and commercial radio stations to multichannel and broadcast images, data and broadcast websites, which use a back channel to deliver pages of web content to compatible digital radio sets.

Martin Orrell, General Manager, Mobile TV at TTP commented, “We believe that the launch of visual and download services using broadcast will be an important catalyst for mobile growth worldwide. The mobile broadcast interactive media market is taking off around the world.”

Chris Gould, Managing Director of All In Media, said, “With the increase in listening to radio via mobile phones, digital radio is a natural feature to offer in handsets. The interactive visual DAB application demonstrates that radio is not just an audio-only platform but can also offer exciting new multimedia features to radio listeners.”

The phone being used for the demonstration of the service is the Lobster, with content broadcast on the Eureka 147 DAB digital radio standard which is being trialled in Sydney. Broadcasters will upgrade to the improved DAB+ standard for the start of permanent digital radio services in 2009, as it allows them to send twice as much data as DAB over the same bandwidth.

The digital radio-enabled phone was part of a display of digital radios at the commercial radio industry’s national conference being held in Melbourne today.

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At the conference, UK expert Dominic Strowbridge, a former executive of BT Movio, said research amongst the users of mobile TV in the UK found that digital radio was a vital component of the offering. While mobile TV is still developing a business model, the research was very positive for radio, with 38% of all those surveyed (and 46% of the 16-24 age group) saying they listened to digital radio via their mobile daily. Of those who used it, 43% said they used it for around an hour or more each session.

“The combination of both TV and radio gives consumers more content choice and the ability to really personalize their mobile entertainment service to whatever mood they are in,” Strowbridge said. “This suggests that the appropriate way to deliver the winning consumer experience is to use a hybrid approach to technology, potentially combining 3G, DAB+ and DVB-H.”

Ms Warner said research conducted in Australia two years ago showed about one third of consumers had listened to radio via their mobiles. “Digital radio could become a compelling reason to choose a handset because it can deliver exciting new content to consumers free to air,” she said.

Also at the conference, the UK’s leading digital radio manufacturer, Pure, announced it is establishing a local entity, Pure Australasia, based in Melbourne, to service the new Australian and New Zealand digital radio markets. Pure has released the Siesta clock radio (its first DAB+ upgradeable radio, which means it can be upgraded to receive DAB+ signals with software that is currently in development), and plans to bring out the first DAB+ ready digital radios in early 2008.

A limited DAB+ test channel is now on air in Sydney, but tech-crazy Aussies will have to wait until the official launch of digital radio in January 2009 to get a wide range of commercial digital stations and new content choices. For more information about digital radio, visit www.digitalradioaustralia.com.au.



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Note: High-res images of the digital radio phone and the Pure Siesta are available by email.

Editor’s notes:

About Commercial Radio Australia

Peak industry body Commercial Radio Australia represents 98% of commercial radio stations in Australia. It is coordinating the trials and rollout of digital radio in Australia on behalf of its members and the Digital Radio Broadcasting Australia (DRBA) consortium of commercial and public broadcasters. For more information visit www.commercialradio.com.au.

About TPP and its DBTV technologies

TTP is Europe's leading independent product and technology development and licensing company providing software, intellectual property and hardware services. Its digital broadcast TV (DBTV) technology includes both DAB IP based digital TV and DAB radio reception and supports the main open broadcast standards for delivering TV to mobile devices - using IP multicast. It is completely independent of receiver hardware - making it suitable for all major markets around the world where spectrum is available - and is ideal for feature phones, smart phones, PDAs and media players. For more information visit www.ttp.com.

About All In Media

All In Media (AIM) is a new technology company providing consultancy and technical services to the radio industry. Whether it’s online, mobile or broadcast, new media platforms open up new opportunities for broadcasters and content providers. How those platforms are utilised is key to the future of any multi-platform, multi-media content business. AIM works with broadcasters to devise and implement multi-platform data strategies that make the most of the digital opportunities. For more information visit www.all-in-media.co.uk.