ABC Radio

Our DAB+ journey so far

Notes from Jeremy Millar
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Quick agenda

- Context: Radio at The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)
- DAB+ specifically
  - Transmission savings from shared infrastructure
  - Spectrum efficiency
  - Opportunity to niche format, broaden the range of content and serve audiences better by making content available on multiple platforms
  - Extend the ABC brand
  - Pop-up stations
  - Summary
The Australian Broadcasting Corporation

• The ABC is one of two public broadcasters in Australia

• Launched in 1932, with a single radio service, the ABC has developed into a multi-platform media operation and a public broadcaster of international renown, delivering Australian stories and conversations across the nation and to the region.

• The ABC Charter, set down by Parliament, requires the Corporation to provide informative, entertaining and educational services that reflect the breadth of the nation.

• Amongst other things, ABC Radio is proud to broadcast a range of services on DAB+, and we work closely with Commercial Radio Australia on a range of common interests and industry initiatives – specifically including further development of DAB+ in Australia
DAB+ is part of our Radio strategy

1. **Audience focus**
   - ABC Radio will have compelling content for a broad audience and deliver it with confidence, creativity and efficiency.

2. **Digital leaders**
   - **Actively promote and expand DAB+ coverage**
   - Strategy for the connected car, and other third-party opportunities.
   - Class-leading ABC RadioPlayer app with high levels of personalisation.

3. **Reinvestment**
   - Investment strategy will see financial resource re-prioritised to areas of greatest potential.

4. **Fit for purpose**
   - To deliver all this, we will be leaner, agile, and fit for purpose.
Some DAB+ highlights include

- Significant increase in audio quality for AM stations in particular – a path to the future
- Excellent branding opportunities - listeners tune in by station name, now-playing information is also available. Some sets feature an electronic program guide or images alongside broadcasts
- Significant additional choice, with around 30 additional radio stations in cap-city markets
- Automatic search of the stations available.
- Opportunity for multimedia, also to pause and resume listening
In Australia, share of listening for AM networks has been trending downwards, and AM listening makes up less than one quarter of total radio audiences

- Australia has had a long and successful relationship with AM radio, but the trends suggest we are past “peak AM”
- DAB+ represents a substantial audio improvement and level playing field for AM in cap-cities
Transmission savings from shared infrastructure

- ABC is a joint-venture partner with SBS (another public broadcaster) for DAB+ transmission services in Australia
- DAB+ roughly 30 times cheaper than AM to operate, 8 times cheaper than FM*
- We work closely with Commercial Radio Australia (CRA) on strategic planning, industry marketing and various technical issues. *This cooperative approach has been essential*
Spectrum efficiency

- ABC radio has experimented with bit-rates and has been pleasantly surprised at the quality – there is little obvious need to increase it from current levels.

- With a well-installed antenna in coverage areas, reception on the move is robust and, without multipath interference, is significantly better than FM.

- The use of a Single Frequency Network allows broadcasters to be economical with frequency use. Different transmitters combine their signal to offer more robust reception.

- The use of multiplexes - single transmitters carrying a number of different services - means a level playing field in terms of reception quality.
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<tr>
<td>ABC Local</td>
<td>59 local stations – topical talk, news and local events</td>
<td>Mix of AM and FM</td>
<td>ABC Jazz</td>
<td>All things Jazz</td>
<td>DAB+ markets</td>
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<td>VAST, Podcasts</td>
<td>Double J</td>
<td>Music for those graduating from triple j</td>
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<td>triple j</td>
<td>The best new Australian music</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>Unearthed</td>
<td>New and unsigned bands from across Australia</td>
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<td>ABC Classic FM</td>
<td>A showcase of Australian classical music</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>ABC Country</td>
<td>Country music, with high focus on Australian content</td>
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<td>IP audio stream</td>
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<td>VAST</td>
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<td>ABC NewsRadio</td>
<td>Regularly updated news on a near continuous basis. BBW Worldservice</td>
<td>Mix of AM and FM</td>
<td>ABC Extra</td>
<td>Pop-up station</td>
<td>DAB+ markets</td>
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<td>News and current affairs, ideas and the national conversation</td>
<td>Mix of AM and FM</td>
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Serve audiences better by making content available on multiple platforms

All of these Radio services are simulcast on IP audio for playback via

• Dedicated ABC Radio app
• Dedicated triple j apps
• ABC web sites
• Third-party services such as Tuneln audio - app and website
• Industry apps such as the Radio Player app, iHeartMusic app and so on
• Some radio brands simulcast on the ABC digital TV platform
• All of the stations found on our DAB+ services are also carried on the VAST satellite platform for Regional and remote Australia

However, the biggest audience numbers (with respect to “non-analogue” platforms) is DAB+
Extend the ABC brand

- Australian audiences outside the DAB+ markets can hear the IP audio streams, but ultimately we would like to see DAB+ available to more of the country.

- Currently Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth (with trial in Canberra) covering some 65% of the population

- New markets of Hobart, Darwin and full service in Canberra will see DAB+ services become available to 72% of the population - this extension of DAB+ into the remaining capital cities provides a cost effective means of providing a superior digital service to approximately 700,000 listeners.
Pop-up stations

We have used spectrum set aside for pop-ups to cover

- Radio New Zealand feed after the Christchurch earthquake
- Replay of Apollo moon landing on 40th anniversary
- Beatles special anniversary weekend, Nirvana special anniversary weekend
- Various writers and arts festivals
- Sport – e.g. The Australian Open, The Tour Down Under, Australian Cricket Tour of India
- Chinese New Year, NAIDOC Indigenous week, Science Week
- AUSmusic month, Summer of Podcasts
- Australia Day, World Radio Day, TEDx Sydney,

...and so on

Reserving spectrum for periodic pop-up usage has been great positioning and promotion
Other thoughts

• It is easy to under-appreciate the value that people assign to listening to a radio (device). *Don’t do that!*

• **Anyone can do IP audio, but very few can do DAB+ so make the most of it**

• IP audio is critical in partnership with DAB+. But it is not a bigger than broadcast, not yet anyway – maybe in 10 to 15 years?

• Car penetration improving all the time – but after market kits are important as average age of a car in Australia is 12 years (old)

• Graphics remain an opportunity. While one of Radio’s great strengths is you don’t have to look at it, we could do more with the GUI
For populated areas, DAB+ is a perfect choice for radio listeners and broadcasters

- It offers significantly improved choice, far better reception, and a level playing field in terms of quality.
- It is more popular than internet streaming, and cheaper for broadcasters.
- DAB+ is not yet available in enough cars, needs more marketing within the industry, and needs to continue building awareness in the wider market.
- Its problems are not technological.