

23 October 2006

Radio trials EPG technology

Australian radio broadcasters will partner with London based digital broadcasting software development specialists Unique Interactive to add an Electronic Program Guide (EPG) service for the digital radio trial in Sydney, as the industry prepares for the multimillion dollar rollout of digital radio services across Australia in January 2009.

The service will use Unique Interactive's proprietary EPG data management software and enables broadcasters to manage and update EPG data for the radio services participating in the trial.

"The addition of EPG data means that listeners will be able to see detailed program information about their radio stations up to a week in advance on EPG enabled DAB digital radios," said Joan Warner, chief executive officer of peak industry body Commercial Radio Australia.

"We believe features such as electronic program guides and the ability to download music directly from digital radios will add a lot of consumer excitement to the launch of digital radio in 2009," she said.

Australian radio broadcasters are also due to begin a separate technical trial of new digital radio technology, using AAC+ coding with the Eureka 147 standard. This technology is favoured by the Australian Government because it requires less spectrum. It would enable radio stations to deliver either one signal at high sound quality, split their signal to deliver two audio services, or provide a combination of both audio and data.

"If the trial is successful, this next generation technology future proofs the industry's investment in digital radio and it's a win win for both the government and broadcasters, because it means we can offer a richer, free to air radio experience for listeners without requiring massive amounts of broadcasting spectrum," said Ms Warner.

"Radio is holding its own against the onslaught of new technology - but moving to digital will put us on a new playing field in terms of our ability to compete and provide innovative content."

The trial of the AAC+ coding will be the most comprehensive in the world and is planned to be conducted in parallel with trials in the UK. Commercial radio is partnering with Broadcast Australia and the ABC in the trial. If successful, the new standard could then be approved by international authorities early next year.

Ms Warner said the industry expects to have the digital transmission network in place and to begin test broadcasts in key metropolitan areas in 2008. The first digital radio receivers compatible with the new technology are expected to be available on the market by mid 2008, ahead of a full scale consumer launch of digital radio in key markets in January 2009. A rollout in regional areas is expected to follow soon after.

Digital radio offers a leap in sound quality from AM and FM, as well as potential new features including a screen displaying images or text such as song titles, artist information or news and weather reports. Listeners will also be able to pause and rewind live radio, and potentially download music tracks instantly to special digital radio-enabled mobile phone handsets.

For more information about digital radio, visit www.digitalradioaustralia.com.au.

Media contact: Judy Shaw. Ph: 02 9281 6577 or 0418 415 965.