

Radio on the Internet

“How many listeners do you have?” Is the first question I get asked when I tell them that I am a presenter on an internet radio station. My answer is usually, “I don’t know.”

And, they have a point. Who listens to radio on the internet? In fact there is a problem with the word, “radio.” A radio set is a physical object: the machine; the box one buys in order to listen to the programmes which are made to be transmitted through it. And, that seems to provide a major obstacle to obtaining listeners because the other question I get asked is, “How can I listen to you? What frequency/channel are you on?” They want to be able to tune into the programme “on the radio.” When I tell them that they can’t, they often say, “Oh, it’s on the internet,” and that is where their interest wanes. Yet it is much easier to locate me there than playing around with a dial or trying to remember whether I am on FM or AM. If they cannot remember the web site address they can write Brooklands Radio into google and when it takes them to www.brooklandsradio.co.uk all they have to do is to click on “Listen Live,” and there they are. It’s me, every Tuesday afternoon from 2.00 pm until 4.00 pm. Somehow or another, that seems to be beyond a lot of people.

So, do I have any listeners for my show? All internet radio stations should receive regular listener stats from their streaming. Ours indicate that we have a regular audience of about 1700 per week and national studies seem to indicate that generally internet radio listener figures are rising. But, as these figures are based on connections it is impossible to ascertain to which programmes they are listening so, how many are listening to me?

Well, I have 2 loyal friends who seem to listen to me most weeks (except when they leave me to go to a funeral or to the doctors or, heaven forbid, to Tesco’s.) I know they are there when they email me to comment on my choice of record or on one of my stories. Once, I actually did get an email from some company or another asking me to play a request for one of the staff who was doing some charitable challenge! You may scoff but I know that some of my fellow presenters who have been doing their shows much longer than I have never had any communication like that at **all!** We are also “streamed” (yes, I think that’s the right word) to a local garden centre and hairdresser. So, perhaps I get more listeners than I realise.

For most people radio over the internet still seems very new but apparently it is not. New Scientist reported that “since the mid-1980s it has been possible to save digitized audio in files and send them over the Internet using standards devised by companies like Sun Microsystems and Microsoft.” The first internet-only radio station, The Internet Multicasting Service (IMS) was founded in 1993 by a technologist, author and public domain advocate, Carl Malamud. A non-profit

organisation, IMS depended largely on charitable contributions for its survival. It closed down in 1996 but it was the start of the deluge.

The first category of “internet radio stations are not internet radio stations at all really. They are the mainstream radio stations (which you listen to on your “radio,”) and who are symbolised by the BBC who have chosen to have an internet presence because it allows them to reach those parts of the world which are inaccessible by radio waves alone

The second category is the one which is new. They are the stations which can only be captured on the internet alone. They have no wavelength, usually no licence and no presence on any radio set and it is they, it can be argued, who are taking radio in new directions. They are often known as “web radio, net or streaming radio, e-radio or online radio.” and that is the kind of station for which I broadcast every Tuesday afternoon.

Internet radio services are usually accessible from anywhere in the world. One of my recent colleagues is South African and his family was able to listen to him “live” in Cape Town as he did his programme in Weybridge, Surrey on a Sunday afternoon. Recently, I had an email from my nephew who said, “....so I was able to listen to your show with my chicken sandwich today over lunch at my kitchen table overlooking Cowichan Bay” a bay and community located near Duncan, in British Columbia.

But its growth has come through other aspects, too. The internet has “democratised” the performing arts, what Andrew Keen in, “The Cult of the Amateur,” calls rather harshly, “digital narcissism.” I must admit I have never been called narcissistic let alone digital.

But, internet Radio can be seen in this category. Brooklands Radio was founded in 2006 by a group of enthusiasts whose original aim was to acquire an FM licence (to broadcast on the “radio,”) during the process.) When that failed, they decided that it was still too good an opportunity to miss and brooklandsradio.co.uk was born.

Like all internet broadcasters my colleagues share one thing: a passion for the radio. Mine stretches over 50 years from the comedy of the Goon Show, Round the Horn, Take It From Here, Tony Hancock and the Navy Lark, which I once saw recorded at the Paris Studios, Regent Street. I can even remember the evening dramas in the 1950’s like Lost In Space, The Saint and Dick Barton, “Special Agent.”

Most of all music was very important: Children’s Choice: Family Favourites and Saturday Club. There were so many personalities: Uncle Mac; Billy Cotton (Wakey Wakey;) Jack Jackson; Terry Wogan and Ed “Stewpot” Stewart. Radio even accommodated the slightly weird although we didn’t see them like that at the time, Peter Brough, a ventriloquist on the radio and the fame of Horace Bachelor from Keynsham (spelt K-E-Y-N-S-H-A-M.) I remember, too, with great fondness the Messiah at Christmas.

Radio, too, became for me a symbol for the Swinging 60’s when I came to London and heard Radio Caroline and Radio London for the first time. I now realise that they were the first real examples of “the democratisation of culture.” I suppose they were the YouTube of their day. Ordinary individuals felt they had something to say so they set up their own station to do it. But, for me, a boy from the Valleys, these stations represented my exciting new life in London

I don't think that I realised what an impact radio had on me until I started to research this article. The 1950's, though, seemed to be a golden age. I doubt whether any future generations will look back and remember radio programmes with the same fondness as I have. The last 50 years or so have seen enormous changes. Commercial radio in the UK particularly as well as the localising of the BBC but internet radio has taken broadcasting to another level

Its special place in this chequered history is that it is personal, local and also worldwide at the same time. Through it, individuals like me do not only talk about their radio history they can now share their passions with the rest of the world. There are 1000's of stations out there doing just that. It would appear to be very easy to do it, too. PC World, for instance, even tells you how you can set up your very own station for free

There is a Goon Show Radio playing JUST Goon shows and streaming out of Sydney, New South Wales; a station dedicated to "Decades of Just A Minute," the BBC game show; at least 47 Bollywood stations from a variety of countries; 6 stations playing the "Sounds of Nature;" 21 stations playing psychedelic music; a station just for the "Sounds From Space;" 50 stations playing Musick of the Medieval and Renaissance and 109 dedicated to Chinese Classical Music. Then, there are the absolutely bizarre: "Phone losers of America" prank calls; the "No holds barred" radio network and another for "Madhouse pranks." Internet radio stations cover every type of interest and audio experience in the world. My little station may seem very boring now.

Brooklands Radio is the local internet radio for North Surrey an area which covers roughly the Boroughs of Elmbridge, Spelthorne, Runnymede and part of Woking. In radio terms it is not a large area and the news and events we read out are very parochial. Even our location seems parochial: above the Library in Weybridge High Street but within our weekly output all presenters, who are volunteers, are encouraged to develop programmes that reflect their interests and passions. A local violinist, together with a mezzo-soprano, present, "The Classical Collection." One young man hosts a local, sports programme. Another helps to foster local, unknown and unsigned talent. Then there's the Folk programme: a programme about Hollywood and the great Musicals, a Blues show, a Fifties show and a Gardening show. There are lots of interviews with local people, particularly in the programme, "Just Women" focussing on interesting and inspiring women within the area while outside broadcasts from local events create colour and atmosphere and help to spread our name to the local population.

My fellow presenters also have their own radio history. Many of them started out in hospital radio but one of them began his career on one of the pirate stations, Radio 390., Another worked on Woman's Hour and BBC Radio Drama. One presenter started out on Hong Kong radio and another on Choice Radio and QVC. One of our younger colleagues became, by accident, the Programme Controller of his University radio station and is now the match day announcer for Woking FC and Oxford Rugby League (I didn't know that Oxford had a Rugby League team.)

We have several voice over artists, at least 2 actors (including me,) a stand-up comic, a professional hot air balloon pilot. (Hot air....well, how appropriate) One was short-listed to be the voice of the speaking clock (female, obviously,) another was

the first person to sing live on Classic FM and one was a former contributor to BBC's Airport series. We present an interesting and eclectic bunch.

The station is committed, too, to give the local communities a voice as well providing education and training for schools, colleges and other bodies. It supports local voluntary organisations in a variety of ways as well as providing a platform for the arts in North Surrey. Through adverts and interviews they help small local businesses to get as wide a local coverage as possible.

I suppose that my contribution is really rather unimaginative. I host a typical afternoon music programme. I play music, some of which I have never heard before (like Nero and "Robyn with Kleerup") but most of which (Michael Buble, Adele, Neil Diamond and others) I absolutely love. As well as advertising local events, reading out the weather and summarising the traffic problems, I talk to myself (well, all DJ's talk to themselves but hope someone is listening!) about weird stories and interesting scientific or medical studies that have appeared in the international press.

I am not a particularly technical person but I sit at the recording desk in my headphones and sliding "faders" up and down (there, I'm more technical than I thought.) I press buttons, try to keep an eye on 3 computer screens and 2 dials at roughly the same time and on top of this I have to keep an eye on the timing: Travel at twenty past and ten to the hour and the News jingle which has to start at 59 minutes 47 seconds. Sometimes, (that's possibly an understatement.) I make mistakes. I have been known to play one record over another and get my timing wrong as I am too busy singing along with one of the songs. My listeners (if I have any at that point) are very forgiving. Despite all this, doing my programme is one of the high spots of my week and the 2 hours fly by.

Do my listeners think it flies by and are they at all interested in what I say? Do I add anything to the great radio tradition? I try to bring laughter, enthusiasm and myself to it and my listeners (the ones that I know, anyway,) do tell me that they enjoy what I do so I suppose that will have to do. Before I end I should tell you about the highest spot. I did my show on Christmas Eve this year and for the first time my family listened and they all emailed me asking for a request. That included my wife, my middle son and my grandchildren aged 6 and 3.

Radio doesn't get any better than that.