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Representing: Self

Comments:

As the chief executive of RadioScape said November 23rd:

"Even with hundreds of DAB radio products now available and the strongest ever consumer awareness at over 65% of the population (in the UK), DAB digital radio sales still only make up around 20% of all radios sold at retail." Many of these products also have FM. The DAB system is outdated and inefficient and the UK public is still not convinced by it.

The UK radio industry should be taking the opportunities offered by the new version of DAB using the AAC+ codec. This enables more robust reception, better sound quality and for a greater number of stations to be transmitted on each multiplex, thus giving lower transmission costs. New receivers will be backwards compatible with the existing mp2 standard. Therefore the second national commercial radio multiplex could accommodate one or two AAC+ services from its inception as could other multiplexes, particularly with Ofcom allowing stations to reduce bit rate on stereo music stations from 128 kbps to 112 kbps.

If digital radio listening grows at the rate forecast it should be possible, perhaps in five years time, to set a date by which all DAB services move to the AAC+ codec. In anticipation of this the new backwards compatible receivers could be labelled "High Definition DAB ready" or some similar term just as television sets are labelled HD ready.

To accommodate particularly local and community stations who are unable to be accommodated on a DAB multiplex, or cannot afford the financial costs, Ofcom should consider using DRM+ in the existing FM band. A paper I have read by John Sykes, Project Director BBC World Service, has proposed interleaving DRM+ stations between the current FM allocations.

DRM would be an excellent use of existing UK AM frequencies, many of which have small audiences and, in the case of some BBC local radio frequencies, are largely duplicating programming which is available in on FM throughout the service area. However development of DRM receivers has been extremely slow and local interference, particularly broadband over power line networking devices, may limit DRM's effectiveness. The industry needs to work with receiver manufacturers to ensure that low cost DAB/DRM receivers with a reasonable battery life are available for consumers if and when DRM licences are to be issued as well as study how much electrical interference will limit the systems usefulness on the AM bands.