

Good Things Come In All Sizes

There have been some interesting radio happenings lately for those who like juxtapositions.

Just this past December the behemoth of broadcasting, the BBC World Service, celebrated its 75th Anniversary, as sister magazine CQ's editor Rich Moseson touched on in this space last month. It was sobering to reflect on the societal impact of this media giant, which circles the globe, carries audio in 33 languages, and has reached an inestimable number of ears in its time. (Ironically, in the Service's first transmission, founder Sir John Reith felt the need to dampen expectations with the words "as to programmes—don't expect too much in the early days...The programmes will neither be very interesting nor very good.")

Now, three quarters of a century later, an inheritor of the venerable "Auntie" (as the BBC is sometimes known) comes along in the form of a startup company called FlyTunes. FlyTunes unveiled at January's Consumer Electronics Show a new digital music service for our unabashedly individualistic era. The buzz was that it would let users build their own "radio stations" from tens of thousands of existing online streams.

According to a company news release, "The FlyTunes service offers users a personalized satellite *radio-like experience* [italics mine], with thousands of channels of digital music that can be enjoyed anywhere they go, regardless of wireless connection." Compatible with Apple iPhone, iPod Touch, and other portable media players—and multimedia-enabled cell phones—the company says its service offers over 100 times more channels than satellite radio and, unlike satellite, will play everywhere and will be available without fees.

"Because FlyTunes uniquely sits between the broadcasters and the listener, it offers users personalized music, which has never been possible for satellite or terrestrial broadcasters," said FlyTunes CEO Sam Abadir.

It may not be "radio," but for the portable electronic media-toting masses, it may very well "fly."

Somewhere in between the two approaches—in a size Goldilocks might deem "just right"—lies low-power FM. Hardly sporting Auntie's number of gray hairs nor extended family (the FCC created this service only in 2000 and an LPFM station's radius is only a matter of miles), it also isn't "broadcasting-for-the-one." It is, by design, community radio.

LPFM stations are available to noncommercial educational entities and public safety and transportation organizations, but are *not* available to individuals or for commercial operations. Current broadcast licensees with interests in other media (broadcast or newspapers) "need not apply." Major beneficiaries of LPFM access include schools, churches, and local municipalities.

When the service was created, it was hailed by local radio activists and bitterly opposed by existing commercial broadcast concerns. Despite the FCC mandate, with such powerful opponents it's not been an easy road for LPFM, and the fight to preserve it has been taken to Congress more than once. And there are still continual attempts to erode it.

Luckily for those who value a diversity of voices in radio, many organizations—and countless individuals—are dedicated to promoting LPFM. One such organization, the non-profit Prometheus Radio Project, is covered this month in "LPFM's Rallying Cry—Low Power To The People!" by Kate Blofson, KB3PYW, starting on page 15.

If you, too, value the diversity of voices in radio, add your voice to the effort to keep local radio thriving by contacting your Congressional representatives (see Blofson's suggestions).

Going back 75 years again to that same inaugural broadcast, Sir John Reith was decidedly more accurate than he was about the BBC's programming when he extolled radio's "almost incalculable importance in the social and economic life of the community."



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