



HD Radio- A New Wave of Independent Media or the Next Wave of the Same Old Media Monopoly?

The emergence of digital radio dramatically increased the amount of content that can be broadcast, creating an opportunity to diversify the airwaves and put more media ownership in the hands of independent programmers with local programming. Despite this window of opportunity, the current state of digital radio is shaping up to be a high-definition version of the same profit driven media ownership of the past, brought to you in HD by an alliance of big broadcasters, manufacturers and regulators. This axis of big media has crafted technology and policy to seize digital radio's new real estate and exclude other voices. Now that they have monopolized the new HD market they are pushing for a power increase that research shows would interfere with neighboring stations, especially putting low-power fm community stations in jeopardy.

IBOC- The Corporate Slicing of the Digital Pie

The new digital system known as In-Band-On-Channel (IBOC), allows radio stations to send a digital signal on each side of their existing "analog" channel. The new digital channels are proportionate to the power of their existing analog signal. This enables big stations to end up with a surplus of digital spaces on which to replicate their existing monopoly over the airwaves.

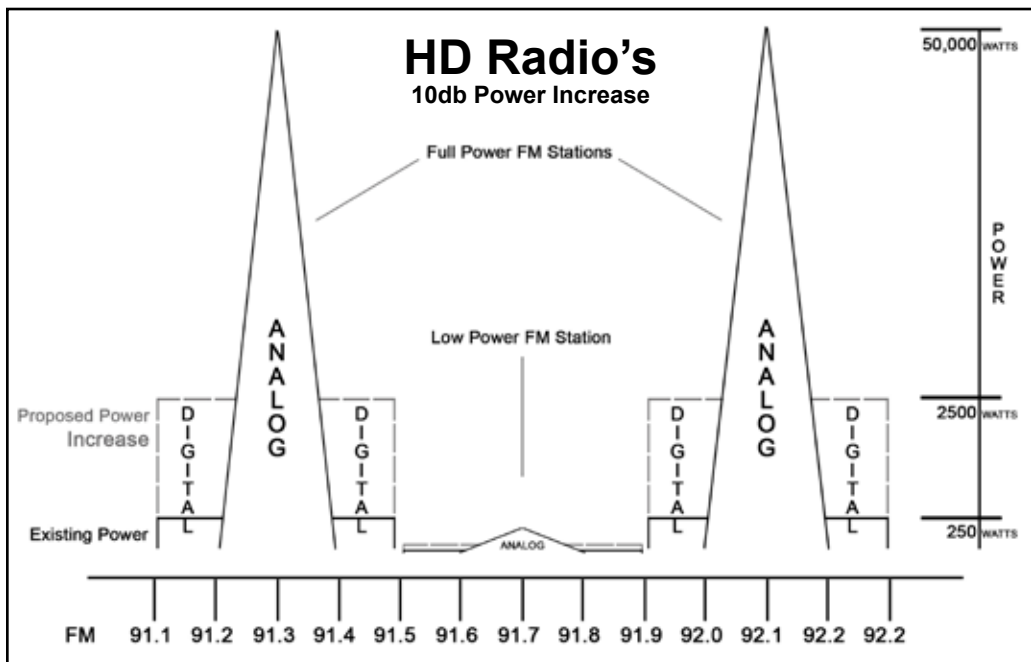
Some alternatives to the expansionist model of IBOC gave all stations, regardless of their power, equal access to digital space, essentially leveling the playing fields between the Davids and Goliaths of radio. Despite public input and a campaign supporting these alternative technologies, a coalition led by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and HD Radio developer IQuiquity Corporation, persuaded the FCC to support IBOC as the industry standard for digital audio broadcasting, prioritizing new revenue streams for existing owners above new public media access. Since then, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has lobbied Congress for tens of millions of dollars to subsidize IBOC radio technology for public radio stations, such as those in the National Public Radio (NPR) network. However the technology has been slow to catch on. Though federal subsidies have spread HD radio technologies among FM transmitters, consumers have had little incentive to purchase the expensive new HD receivers that offer comparable quality and barely any new content.



HD Radio Power Increase Could Threaten Existing Stations

Newly branded as HD Radio, IBOC technology has been proven to produce poor coverage and even interference to existing analog signals. Though the technology was adopted on the basis that a digital signal can provide more coverage with less power, in practice many digital signals are in fact covering less than the old analog signals did. **But now that IBOC has been deemed the sole digital radio technology, what's their solution when it doesn't work?... Give it more power!**

A coalition of the biggest HD radio broadcasters and manufacturers has recently petitioned the FCC to permit an additional 10 fold power increase in digital operation power, citing a study by IQuiquity Corporation. However, an NPR led study showed such an increase could cause interference to existing analog stations. Low power community stations could be left especially vulnerable. The irony is that the same broadcasters who fought the creation of analog Low-power FM stations on the bogus basis of cross-channel interference, are now advocating a power increase that would create vastly more interference than LPFMs ever could have.



Since 2002, stations have been allowed to send out a digital signal on each side of their existing analog channel that is 1% of the power of their current radio station. For example, a 50,000 watt radio station is currently allowed two 250 watt digital subchannels next to their main analog channel (250+250= 500; 1% of 50, 000). Now an alliance of big broadcasters and manufacturers would like to raise the power of these two digital subchannels to 10%, so a 100 watt LPFM analog station might have two 2500 watt digital interfering signals immediately next to it.



In a June 13, 2008, comment to the FCC the NAB stated: "NAB recognizes that the proposed increase in power for FM IBOC broadcasts may create new instances of interference in certain situations...NAB believes that the benefits to be gained for FM broadcasters and FM listeners will far outweigh the limited additional interference predicted by iBiquity's studies."

But it's clear that only the existing HD media monopoly would benefit from this expansion in digital radio real estate, leaving smaller stations drenched in interference.

Take Action! Stop the Power Increase, Protect the Public Interest!

Low-power FM (LPFM) community radio stations have remained one of the few media outlets for local, diverse and citizen based media, and the transition to digital radio should provide them more opportunities for new channels, not put them in jeopardy. In alliance with a Public Interest Coalition, Prometheus Radio has filed comments to persuade the FCC to regulate the next wave of technological development with greater public interest protection and benefits. Our goals are to:

- 1) Limit the scope of the power increase to protect existing analog stations
- 2) Require large broadcasters to give their surplus digital spaces to small and new radio stations broadcasting local content
- 3) Hold broadcasters accountable by requiring them to report on their public interest usage of new channels

If you are a member or listener of an LPFM or just believe in public access to the airwaves this effects you! Make your voice heard! **Submit a reply to public comments to the FCC online by Jan 12, 2009:** <http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/ecfs/Upload/> (File comments under Docket # 99-325)

FOR MORE INFO: http://prometheusradio.org/take_action/fcc_comments/

TO CONTACT PROMETHEUS RADIO PROJECT: info@prometheusradio.org

WHO'S WHO? In the Proposed HD Radio Power Increase

An HD Digital Radio Alliance comprised of HD Radio's 18 biggest broadcasters operating over 1,200 FM radio stations and the 4 largest manufacturers, have filed a joint request to the FCC lobbying for the 10 fold digital power increase. A Public Interest Coalition of 12 media rights groups have filed comments in opposition to the increase on behalf of small radio stations across the country.

Public Interest Coalition

Alliance for Better Campaigns
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists
Benton Foundation
Campaign Legal Center
Center for Creative Voices in Media
Center for Digital Democracy
Center for Governmental Studies
Common Cause
National Federation of Community Broadcasters
New America Foundation
United Church of Christ, Inc.
Prometheus Radio Project

HD Digital Radio Alliance

American Public Media Group
Backyard Broadcasting, LLC
Beasley Broadcast Group, Inc
Black Crow Media Group, LLC
Bonneville Holding Company
Broadcast Electronics, Inc.
CBS Radio Inc.
Clear Channel Communications, Inc.
Commonwealth Broadcasting Corporation
Commonwealth Public Broadcasting Corporation
Continental Electronics Corporation
Cox Radio, Inc.
Emmis Communications Corporation
Entercom Communications Corporation
Greater Media, Inc.
Harris Corporation
Journal Broadcast Corporation
Lincoln Financial Media Company
Nautel Maine Inc.
NRG Media, LLC
Radio One, Inc.
WNYCRadio

HD Radio Timeline

- 1998 - Early IBOC technology debuted at National Association of Broadcasters
- 1999 - Lucent Digital Radio, Inc., begins testing IBOC Digital Audio Broadcast systems with various broadcasters including NPR stations.
- July 12, 2000- Lucent Digital Radio and USA Digital Radio merge to form Ibiquity Corporation to develop and commercialize IBOC digital radio technologies
- February 1 2002- IBiquity releases report making the case for IBOC technology
- October 11, 2002- FCC files a report in order selecting IBOC as the official system for Digital Audio Broadcasting.
- October 15, 2007- Public Interest Coalition filed joint public comment with FCC calling for public interest obligations and protection in new digital radio technology
- February 2008- Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) lobbies congress for substantial subsidies for public radio to invest in IBOC/HD technology
- June 10, 2008 - Joint Coalition of HD broadcasters and manufacturers petition FCC to permit a 10db power increase
- June 13, 2008- NAB files FCC comment in support of Joint Parties request for a power increase in digital transmission in spite of proven interference
- July 9, 2008- NPR publishes final report claiming a power increase could cause station interference and jamming
- October 23, 2008- FCC files public notice seeking public comments on the proposed power increase
- December 5, 2008- FCC public comments on HD power increase due



So Should My Station Go Digital Or What?

In spite of HD radio industry's catchy campaign slogan claiming "its time to upgrade" don't feel forced go digital quite yet. Unlike digital television there's no mandate to switch and only about 1800 out of 10,000, stations even have digital technology. Investing in a shiny new expensive HD receiver offers you minimal new content from existing analog ones and there are no real benefits yet to switch to HD until increased demand and supply force the technology to improve. If you are a community station or listener you're probably better off waiting till the next wave of technology comes along with better quality and more new content.

Read Public Comments to the FCC

The FCC was recently flooded with public comments in opposition to the proposed 10% power increase. Prometheus was joined by radio stations, broadcast companies, media groups, and radio listeners across the country in telling the FCC how drastically increasing HD power would interfere with existing analog broadcasts and threaten the public interest. Even many stations who have invested in the switch to HD have opposed the increase! Check out what they had to say:

Public Comments filed to the FCC regarding the power increase, Proceeding 99-325:
http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/cgi-bin/websql/prod/ecfs/comsrch_v2.hts

Prometheus Comments to the FCC:
<http://prometheusradio.org/content/view/707/1/>

To find out more about HD Radio and the power increase check out these articles:

Going Digital - The End of Radio As We Know It
<http://www.diymedia.net/feature/fdigital2.htm>

HD Radio - Billion Dollar Boondoggle, Worldsupercaster
<http://worldsupercaster.blogspot.com/2006/11/hd-radio-billion-dollar-boondoggle.html>

HD Radio-LESS CHOICE MORE NOISE!
<http://worldsupercaster.blogspot.com/2005/08/hd-radio-less-choice-more-noise.html>

Why HD Radio is NOT the Future
<http://gormanmediablog.blogspot.com/2008/03/why-hd-radio-is-not-future.html.6>

Is HD Radio a Farce?
<http://hdradiofarce.blogspot.com/2008/01/proposed-fm-hd-radio-10db-power.html>