

Alan Pierce
piercej@optonline.net

Free Radio Reinvents Itself—Again!—with a New Radio Player

New technologies disrupt older technologies, and radio has, throughout its history, served as both a disruptor and the disrupted. When over-the-airwaves free radio entertainment first became available, many people expected newspapers, books, and paid entertainment to be negatively impacted. To some degree, they were, but they all survived, co-existed with radio, and prospered.

Radio's magnificent rise as the ultimate mass-media technology was, in time, challenged by television, an even more appealing mass-media technology. Radio reinvented itself as it moved out of people's homes and into their cars. When portable transistor radios became available, teenagers were among the early adopters. Listening to the music played by different DJs became a national teenage pastime in the 1960s, and radio's new format seemed to make its future secure.

Radio started to lose listeners (market share) during what some describe as the "music player invasions" that started with the 8-track tape player. Music on all of these new players was no longer free. First installed in cars in 1966, 8-track players stayed popular through most of the 1970s. The 8-track was killed off by the cassette player, which in turn was killed off by the CD player. During this part of the music player invasion, free radio was able to co-exist.

Free radio's slide increased with the introduction of MP3 players, including that marketing juggernaut, the iPod. To keep profits up, and free music alive, radio stations increased the amount of advertising during their broadcasts. This action, of course, caused many listeners to look for alternative free music feeds.

Free radio is again reinventing it-

self by broadcasting free music over the Internet. Hundreds of free Internet radio stations now exist—all willing to podcast or download to your computer the music you want to hear.

One of these free online stations, Slacker Radio, has actually invented a new type of portable radio player (Photo 1). After you properly set up your computer, Slacker Radio's G2 can automatically download future free personal radio programming.

The Slacker G2 player receives its free music from slacker.com (Photo 2). At this web site you select radio stations that play the

and instantly ban and skip the songs you don't like. The color screen (not visible in sunlight) shows the album art for the artist you are listening to. You can learn more about this new radio player technology at www.slacker.com/assets/introvideo. When testing the technology, I found that the music is almost advertisement free—except for the infrequent announcement that "you are listening to Slacker Radio."



Photo 1 (above)—The Slacker G2 portable radio



Photo 2 (at left)—The slacker.com web site

type of music you want to hear, or you create your own radio stations by selecting specific artists. The 4 GB model will hold 25 stations and the 8 GB model will hold 40 stations. Your Slacker portable G2 player only needs a Wi-Fi connection to download the music to your player. You can refresh the unit at any Wi-Fi hot spot, which gives the unit an infinite capacity.

The computer servers at Slacker also send you new music that matches the genre of the radio station that you designed or selected. The G2 has a favorite and a ban button, so you rate the songs you like

Recalling the Facts

1. How did the invention of radio negatively affect earlier forms of communication?
2. How did subsequent new forms of communication negatively affect radio?
3. What is the most significant difference between the music you play on your iPod and the music that someone might play on their Slacker G2? ©

Alan Pierce, Ed.D., CSIT, is a technology education consultant. Visit www.technologytoday.us for past columns and teacher resources.