

# MEDIA LIFE

## Radio

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## Fact is, AM-FM radio is healthy as ever

*Listening is actually higher among the iPod crowd*

By Diego Vasquez

Apr 26, 2007

*There has been a huge amount of buzz about new digital music platforms over the past few years, from the sale of more than 100 million iPods to the emergence of satellite radio. One might assume that the growth of these alternatives would be draining listeners away from traditional AM/FM radio. In fact, that's not true. Digital music devotees are spending as much or more time listening to terrestrial radio as their non-digital counterparts, according to a study released last week by ratings company Arbitron and Somerville, N.J., market research firm Edison Media Research. The study suggests these people are simply making more time in their schedule for different music media rather than weeding the older types out. The study found that respondents ages 12 and older spent an average two hours and 37 minutes listening to AM/FM radio per day compared with two hours and 45 minutes for those who listen to online radio, subscribe to satellite, or have ever listened to an audio podcast. Digital platform growth continues to be slow. The study found the weekly web radio audience is roughly flat to the past year, at 29 million, or 11 percent respondents. Thirty percent of respondents own an MP3 or iPod, but just 9 percent say they are listening to less AM/FM radio to spend more time with those devices. And while more people are aware of high-definition radio, only 6 percent say they are very interested in it. Arbitron vice president of marketing Bill Rose, Edison executive vice president Joe Lenski and Edison president Jason Hollins answered Media Life's questions about the study.*

### What did you find most surprising or most interesting about this study?

Despite the rise in usage and interest in new digital platforms, AM/FM radio continues to have a big impact on people's lives.

The buzz about satellite, iPods/portable MP3 players, podcasting, HD radio and online radio caused some in our business to question radio's strength with American consumers. This study reveals that AM/FM radio remains vital.

We asked consumers to rate the impact different digital audio platforms have on their lives. Nearly one in five (19 percent) consumers said radio has a big impact on their lives, ranking second only to mobile phones (35 percent) as the audio platform/device that has the biggest impact on the lives of its users.

Ninety-four percent of people age 12 and older tune in each week to radio and nearly eight in ten (79 percent) say they will continue to listen to AM/FM radio as much as they do now, despite increasing advancements in technology.

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**One might expect digital radio platforms to take away from AM/FM listening, but you found there was little decline. Why is this so?**

AM/FM radio continues to be ubiquitous, free and compelling for large numbers of consumers. However, new technology and media tend to promote their services and products as replacements for traditional vehicles rather than complements.

Over the years we have observed that new platforms are not simply substitutes for traditional media. They act as new means for active users of a medium to consume more.

In this study, we see that digital radio users spend slightly more time with radio per day (2 hours, 45 minutes) compared with the average listener (2 hours, 37 minutes).

Digital radio users devote a lot more time to all forms of audio combined, but they report using AM/FM radio for about the same amount of total time as those who do not use digital radio.

**What digital medium do you think will have the biggest impact?**

While very early in the development life cycle, there is ample evidence in this research that mobile phones are the next frontier for audio information and entertainment. More than one-third of consumers (35 percent) say the mobile phone has a "big impact" on their lives, and there is significant interest in listening to radio on the cell phone. (Fourteen percent say they are "very interested", and 18 percent are "somewhat interested").

**HD radio has been around for several years now but very few people seem interested in it. How long will it take for this platform to see major growth?**

While radio broadcasters have a big platform to promote HD, there are a wide variety of audio entertainment and information choices available today, and the benefit of HD radio needs to be more clearly stated to stand out from the pack.

Lower-priced receivers and the promise of digital clarity will help, but ultimately it will be the availability of "don't-miss" programming that will drive the pace of adoption.

**Do you think growth for digital platforms has been slow, or at least slower than media buyers think? Why or why not?**

The growth in the number of choices of digital devices has been explosive. Thirty percent of Americans age 12 and older currently own an iPod or other brand of portable MP3 player; that was the number it was two years ago. The key to faster growth is the quality of content. A "hit" is a hit no matter what platform it is delivered on. When hit content is developed and promoted through digital channels, fueling HD, streaming, podcasting and the like, greater usage will follow.

**What's the most important thing media buyers and planners can take away from this study?**

Consumer adoption of technology will continue to rise as consumers seek ways to control when they listen to and when they listen to it. Advertisers would be wise to stay ahead of the curve and will take time to refine advertising business practices, and those who start early will gain in the most effective uses of these platforms.



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