Automotive Workshop VI

19th June 2020

WorldDAB & RadioDNS once again ran an automotive workshop following on from the success of the 5th workshop held in February at the EBU. In these changed times however this workshop was held as an online event and was attended by 50 representatives from the automotive and broadcasting industries.

The four areas of discussions included: Discussion on the impact of Covid19 in both the automotive and broadcasting industries, logos via DAB in vehicles, radio UX in the future in Android automotive and radio and analytics for radio.

The discussion kicked off by focusing on the impact of Covid19 in both the automotive and broadcasting industries including the financial impact and timescales for deployment of new features and if these have been impacted. It was noted the impact on commercial radio during Covid19 and the reduced revenue, also the changing nature of listening at this time without the daily commute though there has been more listening to radio.

Nick noted that the personal space allowed by cars could mean vehicle use will increase and from that radio listening will also increase. There will be less traffic therefore less time spent in the car and also more working from home. The UK market from the radio production side is furloughing their staff, couple of radio groups consolidate many stations will be networked and rebranded, the BBC is trying to manage costs which Covid has incurred for example no sports, sports rights and the need to fill the schedule mean that stations are being squeezed.

Some car brands have a large stock of vehicles, therefore the current cars have FM radio and are not saleable without DAB from Jan 2021 and so there is an opportunity for some companies to retrofit the cars due to Covid. The timeline for vehicles may change due to retrofitting.

VMs agreed that as sales slow, development is slowing also so deadlines for delivery are being delayed especially for new technologies. This isn't good for the radio listening experience. There is a feeling that the situation of Covid has meant that VMs are putting aside their Roadmaps and are having to go forward with new Roadmaps, previous timescales are no longer relevant as some functions maybe set aside in total due to this crisis.

Other regions such as China are bouncing back especially in the auto sector and how this will help confidence in other countries. In the US, in NYC they were looking at reducing rents and reliving pressure on people though country by country there will be different scenarios. There was a discussion on the EECC directive and if anyone was seeing any changes to dates on this however it was not thought that there would be.

The subject of station logos was discussed at the previous workshop. Nick explained that a piece of research on logos in cars was carried out within WorldDAB and it was discussed that this research, which also references open source tools to make it easier for broadcasters to provide station logos, should be distributed.

There seems little feedback from VMs to broadcasters on the value of providing logos. For example, if broadcasters knew there were 1.2 million vehicles in the UK able to support logos (about 20% of cars on the road), they might be more willing to provide correct metadata. It was commented on that often the broadcaster's web teams have the correct logos etc, but providing metadata is not considered as important for in-car as online, and is often executed incorrectly (ie sending station logo on slideshow, which means the logo disappears when driving or is not correct size). Because VMs want to get it right, there are a few workarounds several companies use in order to ensure there are logos, but it would be much simpler if broadcasters could send, and send correctly.

Since the last meeting there has been some development in reporting problems. WorldDAB have created 'Automotive Help Point' which has had a huge response. If WorldDAB can't answer the questions, then we assist in finding the right people to help. This was created in direct response to the last meeting, so we would like to thank you for that suggestion. WorldDAB also has a list of contacts in the members area, so if there is a problem, it is easier to locate who to contact to help fix it, but you do need to be a member.

There is a similar focal point for questions and problem solving in RadioDNS, it's an online test suite for our members. If a problem is found, we can investigate and get it fixed. For non-members we have a feedback email address and have a lot more take up of our support recently, which we see as a good thing. Also, the number and quality of questions is increasing. We think as a result of the last meeting we have feedback from everyone for better central comms, and this has been provided.

Other issues were brought up within this meeting that VMs and broadcasters would like to be resolved. One issue which was mentioned is getting hold of a test receiver. However, it was suggested a stationary test receiver is not as useful as hiring a car for an hour and looking at logos within the car radio dashboard or driving around to research things like tunnel support, for instance, and as of next year all rental cars should have DAB.

Android Automotive was the next item on the agenda. It is a complete Android dashboard so broadcasters need to be implemented as an app. What has been seen so far looks very crude and in fact a regression of radio and so it is paramount we act to improve the radio experience. There is no standard and so all broadcasters and VMs would have to create their own app, which is costly and creates a lack of cohesion for the listener. Looking at Android architecture we need a middle layer so each individual app can be written from a stable and common layer, and we need the silicone chips to allow functionality and make it easier for manufacturers to implement.

Our suggestion is to work as a team to find a common ground and share the expense. This will protect user experience, but we need everyone involved from silicone manufacturers to broadcasters, OEMs and VMs. We have created a group and invited everyone who wants to be involved in the project to join our first meeting, where we will also look at costs and use other radio architecture as a starting point. We will also try to get data on Google's expectation of implementation and this group, as those who know radio best, will be the best people to work on this.

Several questions were raised such as whether there will be much take-up of Android Automotive, but with Volvo already implementing, and RadioPlayer having already done some work on this, it was agreed it was worth a collaboration. The question was asked whether they are intentionally or unintentionally blocking radio out of the vehicle and the EBU responded that their connected car group has asked Android Automotive about this and have not yet received a response. As radio will not be a source of revenue for Google, it was discussed that this might be a reason for lack of attention to the radio area, even though they must have seen the data for radio listening in cars.

The group discussed radio analytics. Greater depth of analytics being communicated would mean broadcasters would be able to see the importance of sending better metadata and become more engaged, and might be able to justify more financial input. We can already see some limited data, but the conversation was more about how we could either make that data more useful by adding context or adding a little more data to make it more meaningful without stepping on the toes of the privacy of customers.

There was concern that providing data to broadcasters doesn't seem to have a lot of worth for VMs and in fact it was suggested that their customers valued knowing their data will not be passed on, and so they try not to collect it in the first place. If they did collect it, it would be the VMs that would want to use it, and not for others to use. Also, if there was a privacy breach, it would be the

VMs that would be responsible, so uptake of this is likely to be low from the manufacturers side.

The value would be in seeing what data is already there and the boundaries of what VMs are willing to provide and then see if it has any meaning to broadcasters.

The ambition would be for it to be open source and have allowed data collected by all, no matter what platform was being used, similar to how Google powers the Amazon Fire stick, but it isn't a google product. Customers would sign in, but this still might be against privacy agreements.

This would need to have benefit to all, so it could be that this information was used to check for coverage issues or other issues VMs are more interested in.

To summarise, we talked about logos and we will work on sharing better insight on what is happening so there can be better judgement on investment. Our Android Automotive discussions will continue and we will look at what we can do in a separate group. We need to continue our conversations on data - it's what broadcasters really need.

Please let us have any feedback on this meeting and any suggestions of topics for the next meeting, which will be in October.

Please contact rosie.kendrick@radiodns.org for more information on this or about:
Future Automotive Workshops
Hybrid radio
Membership

All information can be found on our websites:
WorldDAB.org
RadioDNS.org