

ALPHACAST

A strategy for online listening in commercial radio

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Introduction

AlphaCast explores the impact of digital technologies on radio and its current distribution model. Radio is still very dependant on a centralised distribution of content, broadcasting rigid, linear playlists which don't allow for any user feedback or customisation. This format may not be able to cater to listeners requirements for radio listening in the 21st century.

The birth of the Internet, the web and decentralised means of communication ushered in a new era for media consumers. Themes which have manifested themselves include the need for on-demand, interactive and customisable content. Media consumers now expect ultimate control of what, when and how they consume media.

Music listening is a large part of radio, and radio's position as a tool for discovering and listening to new music has been slowly undermined by mobile music technology and music discovery services such as Last.fm and Spotify. Both cater for the mentality of on-demand and customised content, whereas radio does not successfully address these issues. However, the technology is out there to turn radio listening into an interactive, on-demand experience.

The Application

With this in mind I created a radio player that would attempt to address two key issues. The first was driven by the question 'why not leave the music choice up to the listeners?'. It is the content of radio stations that makes radio great, and if users could satisfy their needs for customisation through tailored playlists, it might be able to re-invigorate current radio audiences and entice younger listeners to tune in.

The application, AlphaCast, uses the Last.fm

API to create tailored music playlists based on information submitted by the user. By monitoring metadata output by a radio station, it can detect when a song is playing, fade out the radio and trigger music from Last.fm. By integrating this service it allows for users to manage the music they are consuming. Other Last.fm functionality has been integrated, allowing users to skip, love and ban tracks. These actions, such as loving/banning tracks, is fed in to a real time status feed which other users can interact with, clicking on artists loved by others to change their own playlists.

The second issue which I wanted to address in this application is the lack of real time feedback to content on the radio. AlphaCast enhances listening to content by allowing users to share snippets of audio. If a user has heard something amusing or interesting on the radio, they can share that content with others by saving a clip and then sharing a dynamic link to Facebook or Twitter. It doesn't allow for sharing of music, solely content. This allows radio to take advantage of current social networking trends and piggy back upon their success to distribute content to new audiences.

Real-world Applications

There is real potential for this sort of tailored listening to be implemented by commercial radio stations. The basic premise would be similar, but instead of streaming music from an external provider such as Last.fm, music could be accessed from the stations own music library.

By offering subscriptions for listeners who wish for a more interactive radio experience, it could open up a new source of revenue, which in the current unstable economic situation could be a real benefit.

The 'share content' option is another way in which radio could appeal to younger listeners. It caters for the themes of on-demand and viral content and allows those listening to share interesting content with their friends, and more importantly those that are not tuned in.

Your feedback on this project and the themes discussed would be gratefully received to help with the documentation of my project. Please contact me on the following email address.

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