

## **Internet Radio**

### **Leaving Your Home Town**

Internet radio is the best place to start when seeking out new music on the Internet. It's the simplest type of online music service to use. It's cheap, and offers riches that cannot be found elsewhere.

#### **Remember When You First Got Cable TV?**

I remember when our family first got cable TV and went from having a handful of TV channels to what seemed like a huge number—perhaps thirty stations. My jaw dropped when I saw all those stations. In an instant, the landscape changed. It's the same with Internet radio, except with Internet radio you aren't limited to the offerings of one or perhaps two providers, as you are with cable TV. Internet radio providers number in the thousands, ranging from large media corporations to artists promoting their work to teenagers operating out of their bedrooms. No longer are you limited to the local airwaves.

You can now tune in to the offerings of broadcasters across the country and around the world. For Jamaican music you can now go right to Jamaica; for the latest in British pop, right to England. Interested in surf music? The best surf music station I know of comes from Buck's County, Pennsylvania.

#### **Hot and Cold Running Music**

While many Internet radio stations are traditional radio stations that have made their broadcasts Internet accessible, others were created as Internet-only stations. Some of these resemble traditional stations and run different programs in different time slots. Many others, however, focus on one particular musical theme or style, providing 24 x 7 access to that music—a musical faucet of sorts, a single program. Turn it on and music will be playing. You won't hear news on the hour, DJ chatter, or traffic reports. If you tire of listening to one station, or if a different mood overtakes you, a multitude of stations are a mouse click away. Inexpensive to operate, these single-focus stations represent an important new option for music lovers. They allow listeners to dial up musical styles and themes with a specificity and ease that didn't exist before. Provided you know where to look, an astonishing variety of musical styles can be found. These include focused genres like doo-wop, flamenco, or death

## Internet Radio

metal; music from specific periods like the “roaring 20s”; or a combination of both, such as 70s English progressive rock. Other stations address a theme (e.g., holiday music, love songs) or an activity (e.g., workout music, wedding music). Looking for the sound of a particular instrument, such as bagpipes or the banjo? There are stations devoted to them. For chart watchers, there are stations whose playlists countdown the music rankings. Other stations, like Rhapsody’s “Best of 2003” station, only play music from “best-of” lists. Of course, there are also large numbers of conventional stations which play mainstream, commercial music as well.

### **Internet Radio Tells You What You Are Listening To**

Knowing what you are listening to is central to music discovery. Internet radio can make this easy by supplying song and artist information with each song as it is played. This information appears on the media player display on your computer. From here, many services provide links allowing you to access more information about the recording: purchasing information, record reviews, and artist biographies. These services are information rich.

### **It’s Cheaper Than Buying CDs**

In the past if you wanted to hear a specific kind of music—Gregorian chant for example—you needed to play a CD or record that you owned. There was no radio station that provided that kind of music, reliably, 24 hours a day. Now you can fill this need with Internet radio and have no need to buy a recording. So long as you don’t require absolute control over which music gets played, and in which order it gets played, then a targeted radio station will fill the need. Most Internet radio stations cost nothing to access beyond the cost of your Internet connection. Others are available by subscription, as fee-based, “premium” offerings.

### **Ads Can be Avoided, for a Price**

Typically, premium stations will offer ad-free programming and high-quality audio streams. Unlike with traditional broadcast radio, access to Internet radio can be restricted to paying subscribers, in the same way that access to cable TV can. This enables fee-based stations to provide ad-free listening alternatives. If advertisements annoy you, you can now get rid of them, for a price. As of this writing, \$5 per month (or less if you pay yearly) is a common price for access to a collection of premium, ad-free radio stations.

## What You Need to Get Started

To access Internet radio and other Internet music services you need a personal computer, a sound card (most PCs have one), and speakers. You'll also need an Internet connection, preferably a high speed one (cable modem, DSL, or ISDN).

Media player software is also required to play music streams that are broadcast by Internet radio stations. More than likely you already have such software installed on your computer. If not, it can be freely available obtained and downloaded via the Internet. Because there is more than one flavor of Internet broadcast (think AM vs. FM), you'll need more than one player to be able to listen to all the available stations. Most Internet radio station Web sites provide links to Web pages where you can obtain the necessary player software required to listen to their broadcasts. To start exploring Internet radio you can take one of two options:

### 1. Use the media player that came with your computer

The easiest way to sample Internet radio is to use the media player that comes bundled with your computer or computer operating system. For Windows PC users this means *Windows Media Player*. For Apple Macintosh users this means the *iTunes* player. Each of these players has a "radio tuner" which provides access to hundreds of free radio stations.

### 2. Sign up for an Internet radio service

Sign up for one of the radio services recommended in this book. Many are free. Those that aren't offer free trials. The services I recommend include Live365, MSN Radio, LAUNCHcast, and Musicmatch Radio. Each of these services has a chapter devoted to it—to help you decide. Once you've read up on one of these services and decided you'd like to try it, go to Part Three, *Internet Music Discovery Plans*, where you'll find a concrete seven-day plan for getting up to speed with that service.

Internet radio services are fewer in number than individual stations but provide the easiest, most productive way to get started with Internet radio. I define an Internet radio service as a collection of radio stations offered through a single organization, and accessible from a single dedicated player interface. The player is customized to provide links to music information, interactive features, and personalization options. These services make the world of Internet radio more manageable by providing a limited number of station choices, and providing richer and more consistent information about the stations that are available. In some cases, they also help the music explorer by providing rich access to artist and album information, as well as providing tools for people to find music that they like.

## Internet Radio

Individual radio stations can be located using Internet radio directories, Web directories such as Yahoo, and search engines such as Google.

### MAJOR INTERNET RADIO DIRECTORIES AND TUNERS

#### **RealGuide Radio Tuner** - <http://realguide.real.com/tuner>

For users of RealPlayer software: a directory of over 3,200 radio stations broadcasting RealAudio streams, searchable by genre, band (AM, FM or Internet Only), language, and location. Stations can be browsed by broad genre category. Listings include premium radio stations.

#### **Windows Radio Tuner** - <http://www.windowsmedia.com/radiotuner>

For users of Microsoft's Windows Media Player: a directory of radio stations broadcasting in the Windows Media format. Comparable to the RealGuide tuner but adds the ability to search stations by their streaming bit rate (e.g., 56K, T1).

#### **SHOUTcast Directory** - <http://shoutcast.com>

3,500+ stations broadcasting MP3 streams using the SHOUTcast freeware streaming audio software. Features not found in the Real or Microsoft directories include usage based popularity figures, a more detailed genre classification scheme, and in many cases a display of the track that a station is currently playing.

#### **iTunes Radio Tuner**

Computers with the *iTunes* music player/jukebox software have access to the iTunes radio directory—which lists MP3 streams that can be played by *iTunes*. The current version contains approximately 300 stations and is browseable by genre. Not available on the Web.

#### **Live365 Directory** - <http://www.live365.com/index.live>

A directory of radio stations that broadcast MP3 and MP3PRO streams via the Live365 broadcasting service. As big as any of the others, but with richer search options. All stations are accessible using Live365's dedicated player.

#### **Yahoo and Google Directory Listings**

Listings include radio stations and radio services/networks. Inclusion here is an indicator of relative size and popularity.

Yahoo: [http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Music/Internet\\_Broadcasts](http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Music/Internet_Broadcasts)

Google: <http://directory.google.com/Top/Arts/Radio/Internet>

## Using Internet Radio

Listening to radio is more convenient than playing your own music. You don't have to select the recording or worry about which songs to play next. Someone else takes care of this. What's more, you are exposed to new music that you've never heard before. You never know what's going to be played next. This keeps things interesting. Add the tremendous new variety and functionality that Internet radio provides, and new possibilities open up.

Taking advantage of these possibilities requires some action on our part, some new listening strategies. Let's consider the fact that you now have access to *thousands* of stations. Such a wealth of stations invites greater exploration, and requires a greater taste for adventure if you are to claim the treasure that is out there. Living by the ocean is different than living on a pond. You can venture out in a number of ways:

- **Listen to genre-specific stations for new types of music**

Rather than focus exclusively on music genres that you know and like, take the time to listen to music that is new or unfamiliar. This includes music that was popular in previous eras. Pick a genre or style and give it some time to work its particular magic. Think about how it makes you feel, and remember that you can recreate that feeling by tuning back in. Using this approach, I have come to like such forms as dub, surf music, and movie soundtracks from the 60s and 70s.

- **Sample the music of a particular country, region, or culture**

Perhaps you are going on a trip soon or wonder what people in other countries are listening to. Using radio station directories, you can easily find stations broadcasting from a country or city of interest. Alternately you can find single focus stations devoted to music from a particular region or culture (e.g., Hawaiian music, African soukous music, Japanese pop, bagpipe music). Be a world traveler.

- **Experiment with music you can listen to while working**

Though purists might wish it otherwise, the fact is that we inhabit a world of multi-tasking, where we listen to music while doing something else: driving, doing chores, working. While rote tasks can be accompanied by most any music, tasks requiring conscious thought and attention are best accompanied by less obtrusive music, music that is less demanding of our attention. This music works at the peripheries, establishing a mood or a feeling. Options here extend beyond traditional "easy listening" music to include stations that play ambient music, downtempo electronica, New Age music, and certain types of classical and instrumental music.

## Internet Radio

- **Use specific stations to modulate your energy level or mood**

Researchers studying people in commercial environments have long known that music can be used in a functional way to facilitate or reinforce certain moods or mental states. By tuning in to certain Internet radio stations, you can use it this way also. For example, when my mind is getting too busy and I need to calm down, I listen to a station called Astreaux World (<http://www.live365.com/stations/astreaux>), which plays “ambient, New Age, space music” that is meditative in quality. If I need to bring things up a notch I’ll switch to EMjoy, a downtempo electronica station (<http://www.live365.com/stations/fkorf>) that is also relaxing, if a bit livelier. After lunch, if I’m starting to sag, I might switch to Devlar Surf Sessions, a surf music station (<http://www.live365.com/stations/surfinstro>) which plays upbeat, instrumental music that I find energizing.

- **Troll for the bizarre, the unusual, and the novel**

Looking for something different? Live365, a service profiled in the next chapter, has stations devoted to: Disney Resort music, music from the TV show “The Sopranos”, anime movie soundtracks, video game music, World War II radio programs, Philadelphia Mummers music, Renaissance fair music, belly dancing music, sea shanties, and more!

### **What’s Wrong with Traditional Radio?**

Many people are dissatisfied with the state of commercial radio in the U.S. today. “It all sounds the same” and “there’s nothing there for me” are common complaints. Observers point to consolidation in the radio industry as the cause. Since 1996, when Congress deregulated the radio industry, a wave of mergers has placed the majority of radio stations into the hands of a few large corporations. During this time the number of independent radio stations shrank. Uniform corporate policies and market research-driven programming have reduced the variety of music on commercial radio. One critic summed up this approach as “play the fewest songs that appeal to the most people.” Also problematic is the requirement that record companies make big payments to promoters in order to get their songs on the radio. As a consequence it is harder than ever for new acts to be heard on commercial radio; only the biggest and best-financed acts get access to the commercial airwaves. Bill Wyman of the Rolling Stones recently said, “The Rolling Stones would never make it now.”

## Narrowing Down Your Choices

Of course having access to thousands of stations presents its own problems. How to narrow down the choices? One way is to subscribe to an Internet radio service and use its stations exclusively. Each service aims to provide a radio universe of sorts, though some have more variety than others. Decide on which genres are critical for you, and how much variety and eclecticism you desire. Then look at the available services.

Other factors to consider:

- **How good is the dedicated player and interface?**  
Is it easy to use, with rich information and customization options? Will it run on your computer?
- **Does the service have an ad-free offering?**  
Are you willing to pay to get ad-free programming?
- **What audio quality or streaming bit rate do you prefer?**  
You may be an audiophile who requires the highest possible bit rate and audio quality for your streams. Alternately you might have a dial-up connection and be limited to smaller bit rate streams.
- **Is it important to you to hear the voice of a disc jockey (DJ)?**  
By and large, stations on Internet radio services do not have a DJ on hand to talk to you between the songs. They tend to be pre-programmed and display the playlist information in the radio player. For a DJ's voice (recorded or live) you'll need to seek out traditional radio stations that simulcast on the Internet or one of the few Internet-only radio stations that feature live DJs.

For more information about Internet radio services, go to [Giantpath.com](http://Giantpath.com).

"I use music as fuel. If I need to get into a certain mindset I know there's certain songs that I can turn on that just—that's the gas! And that'll get me right where I need to go. Or if I need to get out of a certain state, I'll put on this song or that song—and it just propels you."

- John Cusack (Interview from DVD version of the movie *High Fidelity*)