

Digital Radio in Australia

Fast Facts

Digital Radio is Free-To-Air

One of the biggest attractions is that listening to the radio will continue to be free. With digital radio all you need is a digital receiver and that's it – no subscription fees, no messing about with signing up, just tune in.

Australians listen to an average of two and a half hours of commercial radio a day and there are an estimated 50 million analogue radios throughout the country.

Radio Goes Visual

For the first time radio will have an added visual feature. The DAB+ system will allow radio broadcasters to deliver a much more dynamic, multi-media experience to the listener.

The spectrum efficiency of DAB+ means broadcasters can provide, on a small screen, scrolling news, sport and weather text and transmit a picture of a radio host or band, the cover of a CD or an animated logo, and create an Electronic Program Guide.

Additional Features

DAB+ allows each broadcaster to produce extra audio channels. Many DAB+ receivers will have a pause and rewind option.

Each station will be using the variety of new features to meet the needs of their target audience. Some may offer extra audio or text based channels, others may choose to offer a range of data services such as slideshows, graphics, product pictures and animation. News and sports stations may provide very different features and information to music stations.

Digital Radio Switch-On

Australian digital radio services will officially be switched-on early 2009 in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. Services for other parts of Australia are expected to be phased in following the capital city launch.

Use It or Lose It

1 January had been the mandatory "use it or lose it" startup date, but the Government has now extended this to 1 July 2009 to allow for any unforeseen delays in the infrastructure build.

Stations Going Digital in 2009

Sydney - 2GB, 2CH, 2UE, 2DAY, TRIPLE M, 2KY, WS-FM, MIX 106.5, 2SM, NOVA, VEGA, ABC & SBS stations – including ABC Radio National, Triple J, Classic FM, News Radio, Local Radio.

Melbourne – MIX, GOLD, SEN, 3AW, 3MP, FOX, MAGIC, TRIPLE M, NOVA, VEGA, ABC & SBS stations – including ABC Radio National, Triple J, Classic FM, News Radio, Local Radio.

Brisbane - 4BC, 4BH, 4KQ, B105, TRIPLE M, NOVA, RADIO TAB, 97.3 FM, ABC & SBS stations – including ABC Radio National, Triple J, Classic FM, News Radio, Local Radio.

Perth - 6IX, 6PR, 96 FM, MIX, 92.9FM, NOVA, ABC & SBS stations – including ABC Radio National, Triple J, Classic FM, News Radio, Local Radio.

Adelaide - 5AA, MIX, SA-FM, TRIPLE M, NOVA, CRUISE, ABC & SBS stations – including ABC Radio National, Triple J, Classic FM, News Radio, Local Radio.

Radio Receivers

To listen to digital radio, consumers will need a new receiver. Digital radios will come in all shapes and sizes, including MP3 devices, hi fi, portable players and clock radios. PC radios, which plug into a computer and allow receiver functions to be controlled from the computer screen, will also be available. In-car adaptors and upgrades are also expected to be available and there are likely to be adaptor kits for mobile phones.

Major retailers are expected to stock a range of digital radios in the lead-up to switch on – and leading manufacturers will be introducing more products throughout 2009.

Receiver Costs

Like any product range, digital radio prices will vary greatly depending on their features and capabilities. Entry-level receivers (with scrolling text) are likely to start from around AUD\$135. A receiver with all the digital capabilities will start at AUD\$259. Like any new technology expect prices to fall as more and more people buy receivers.

Simple to tune

Digital radios are incredibly easy to tune. There is no need to remember frequencies. They display the name of the station. Start listening by simply picking a station from the list, and your radio will lock in to the very best reception.

AM & FM

AM and FM radio services will continue to be broadcast to allow consumers adequate time to replace their radios with digital receivers. Over time, digital could eventually replace analogue radio (AM and FM) but older radios won't become obsolete for some time.

Overseas receivers

A receiver purchased from overseas may not be compatible with DAB+. The UK, for example, uses the more basic DAB format (as opposed to DAB+) and radio receivers from there are unlikely to work in Australia.

Digital Radio Broadcasting Australia Pty Ltd

Digital Radio Broadcasting Australia Pty Ltd is a consortium of Commercial Radio Australia (the peak industry body representing 98% of commercial radio stations in Australia), as well as ABC Radio and SBS Radio. It was established in 2003 to run the Sydney digital radio trial. Stations participating in the trial are Nova 969, 2GB, 2CH, 2Day FM, Triple M, 2KY, 2SM, WSFM, 2UE, ABC Classic, ABC dig, SBS One and SBS Two. The trial will end with the switch on of permanent services in 2009.

Digital Radio Planning

Extensive ongoing work is required to test and develop the best digital radio transmission network for Australia. Commercial radio broadcasters switched on the first DAB+ test channel in Sydney in July 2007. The industry is also working with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) on spectrum planning.

Australian Government Policy on Digital Radio

The Australian Government's Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007 was passed in Parliament on 10 May 2007. It enables existing commercial, national and wide-coverage community radio broadcasters to provide digital radio services. In recognition of the significant industry investment required to launch digital radio, it provides for a six-year moratorium on new entrants from the date of rollout, and the opportunity for broadcaster consortiums to control the multiplex licences.

Other countries

No other country has approached the rollout of digital radio in a coordinated and staged manner, working together with advertising, retail, and manufacturer sectors to ensure a smooth launch and a unified message to listeners.

The DAB+ format Australia is adopting has up to three times the capacity of the original DAB standard (used in the UK), and many other countries are watching with interest to see the impact of both the new technology and the success of a staged and coordinated approach.

Jurisdictions such as Italy, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Malta, Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan and a number of Chinese provinces have either commenced or are planning trials of DAB+ or have indicated an intention to commence permanent services.



Information about any of these topics can be found at **digitalradioplus.com.au**