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RADIO SOMEWHERE

BY MAUREEN NEVIN DUFFY • CORRESPONDENT • JULY 20, 2008

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Traditional radio is "going to have to get better. Fast." So says Jerry Del Colliano of Inside Music Media, one of the best radio blogspots around. Del Colliano was responding to reports that Chrysler is planning to equip its 2009 cars with a wireless Internet connection, called UConnect Web. The irony is that while possibly rescuing an ailing auto industry, it just might breathe new life into the wheezing radio business — or, as Del Colliano warns, possibly not.

The future of radio is made more tenuous by the economic malaise that is now reaching radio advertising. Anheuser-Busch, which spent about \$38 million on radio ads last year from its total media outlay of \$475 million, according to Ad Age magazine, said it would slash its radio

budget to ward off a possible takeover.

"The cuts have already affected Clear Channel stations in multiple markets, which took large cancellations for the second half, according to an executive familiar with the situation," says Ad Age. The magazine said cutbacks have also hit Emmis Communications' two Chicago stations, which combined saw spending of about \$1 million a year from A-B.

Readers tell us they're already listening to satellite radio through sophisticated sets, like those from Bose. They've told us how clearly they can tune in the Web stream of some of the weakest signals on radio. Now, if you buy a 2009 Chrysler, you'll be able to keep your dial on your favorite station no matter how far you drive away from the broadcast area. Chrysler already offers Bluetooth connectivity for cell phone users and the ability to play MP3 files, including radio podcasts, through its car stereos.

Avis Rent A Car started offering Web connectivity, called Avis Connect, for an optional price in January of this year.

Del Colliano, himself once a radio program director for the Philadelphia station, WFIL 92, is also a professor of Music Industry at the University of Southern California. While acknowledging the irony or prescience of those call letters, he says, wireless car radios are the way of the future, noting that it was once hard to get FM radios into cars. Yes, we remember.

Wake-up call

"WiFi on Wheels is the latest wake-up call to the radio industry to look beyond the transmitter and tower business and jump into Internet content," Del Colliano wrote in his July 2 column. "Ask most radio CEOs and you get poppycock about issues that only matter to their investment banks for the quarter. They don't know." For those Neanderthals, he predicts, "WiFi on Wheels will prove to be radio's worst nightmare."

We wanted to know what content providers — otherwise known as radio personalities — thought of the idea. So we asked Big Jay Sorensen, a DJ and host of shows on numerous stations with a passion for following industry trends, to weigh in on this one.

"I think that everyone will be on a level playing field, from the smallest basement-variety radio geek, to the most sophisticated programmers on the planet, with the best equipment known to exist," says Sorensen. "Eventually, once this technology is widespread, it will be he who gives the best branding reminders to the public (who will succeed). So the product must be good, or at least perceived that way. Word of mouth will be key; and let the chips fall where they may."

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"The CEO's of the present-day conglomerates must make their brand forever imbedded in the brains of people who will seek content in the easiest way available, whether online, terrestrial or satellite-delivered. The human brain usually can only remember seven brands of any product; some people say only four or five. So let the best brands win!! It's all in the marketing!"

Before the marketing can start though, radio's suits will have to divert from a comfortable, profitable pattern and embrace the brave new world. Predicts Del Colliano: "To compete with thousands of new streams increasingly available on WiFi, terrestrial radio is going to have to get better. Fast."

Maureen Nevin Duffy created and hosted "Asbury Radio — The Radio Voice of Asbury Park", a weekly public affairs talk show over WYGG, 88.1FM, for more than six years. Please send your comments and suggestions regarding Radio Somewhere to AsburyRadio@aol.com or 3 Deal Lake Court, Asbury Park, NJ 07712

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