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## Radio Ministry in Emerging Nations

*John Edmiston*

Old technology can still be good technology! In this article I will discuss how radio (including new types of radio) can help in the delivery of the Gospel.

Even though Cybermissions is an Internet ministry, we have embraced radio because it involves no special equipment for the end user, is widely available, and works with oral learners. It is also easy to produce great audio with simple podcasting equipment.

Over the years Cybermissions has been involved with FM, AM, Shortwave, Satellite and Internet radio and we have our own Internet radio website and app called Eternity Radio. We have also done FM radio planting in Asia, and we were part of Asia by Radio conferences for a couple of years.

We have a 30-minute expository Bible teaching program called Insights for Eternity and a 15-minute pastoral program called Uplifting Moments. We were very briefly (6 months or so) on satellite radio in the Middle East with teaching on Christian emotional intelligence. We broadcast both overseas and in regional USA.

We produce the audio program just once and then distribute it across multiple platforms. For instance, the same MP3 file might be broadcast on FM in Uganda, be uploaded on our EternityRadio.Org website, made available on the Eternity Radio app, and then added to our Olam autoresponder to be sent out to subscribers on an email list. We are also working with a partner ministry for future SD card distribution of our audio content.

### ORAL LEARNERS

“An oral learner is someone who chooses to learn and communicate by oral means rather than written. They can be completely illiterate, functionally illiterate, visually impaired, or hearing impaired, or simply part of an oral culture. Oral learners are people all

over the globe whose mental processes are primarily influenced by spoken rather than textual forms of communication. Two-thirds of the world’s population are oral learners.” (from Bing search)

Oral communicators are people from all over the globe, from all walks of life and all levels of education who communicate primarily or exclusively through oral, not textual means. Their lives are therefore more

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likely to be transformed through stories, songs, drama, proverbs and media. (<https://orality.net/about/who-are-oral-communicators/>)

Scriptures In Use roughly gauged that there are an estimated 5.7 billion people who are oral learners. This includes 3 billion adults, 900 million very young children, and 450 million children

The wonderful folk at the International Orality Network and Visual Story Network among many others have made huge contributions in helping the Church to become focused on developing strategies for oral learners, who, according to ION, constitute at least 80% of the unreached.

Radio is one way to engage with oral learners and it need not just be one way. Local FM or AM talk radio with phone-in listeners can work well. Listeners are encouraged as they hear people sharing their spiritual problems and receiving answers from the presenter.

## THE POTENTIAL OF RADIO

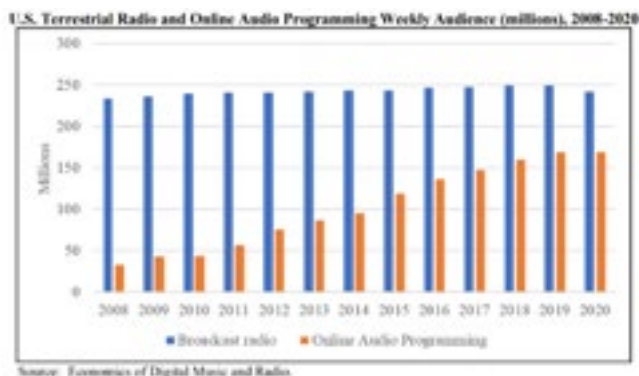
A United Nations article has this to say about the potential of radio: "At the global level, radio remains the most widely consumed medium. This unique ability to reach out the widest audience means radio can shape a society's experience of diversity, stand as an arena for all voices to speak out, be represented and heard. Besides this, radio helps listeners feel less isolated and more connected to their community."

Some of you might be thinking "who even owns radios any more"? There are radios in cars, workplaces and even on your phone!

With the incorporation of various types of radio apps on mobile phones, the phone may also soon be the main receiver of radio. I live in Virginia, USA but I listen to classical music stations from California, Australia and Britain and to Family Radio from New York - on my mobile phone.

The largest radio market is in China and even in the USA 82% of adults listen to radio at least weekly and the average US adult listens to 974 minutes a month of online radio.

Here is a diagram that shows how the US market has changed between broadcast and online:



Even shortwave radio still has an audience, mainly in West Africa and some parts of the Middle East. Wikipedia estimates that there are between 600

million to 1.5 billion shortwave receivers worldwide. There are still some great Christian ministries broadcasting on shortwave such as Voice of Hope which Cybermissions had airtime on until early 2024. Apparently shortwave radio is playing a key role in the war in Ukraine as it is difficult for governments to block.

## MISSIONARY RADIO AND AUDIO

Missionary radio, which is primarily nonprofit, donor-driven and cross-cultural started out with the use of massive shortwave transmitters in the 1950's and then spread to many other audio outreach strategies such as AM, FM and Internet radio.

Examples include:

**Large transmitters:** Voice of Hope, FEBC, TWR, Christian Vision, Reach Beyond

**Radio Technical Ministries:** Galcom

**MP3 Players:** Megavoice

**Recording of Scripture and Bible Stories:** Global Recordings Network

**Audio Bibles:** Faith Comes by Hearing

Over time missionary radio has moved away from a "West to the Rest" model to far more indigenous and culturally relevant strategy. For instance, FEBC only uses locals to create their programming, and SAT-7 uses native Arabic speakers to reach the Middle East.

National evangelists have embraced radio (as well as TV) and a vast diversity of Christian radio stations have grown up throughout the world. This includes "radio planting" of low-powered FM radio stations in many unreached people groups. These small FM transmitters are much easier to maintain than large high-powered transmitters.

A quick Facebook search of the term "Christian radio" brings up hundreds of stations in a wide variety of languages such as Telegu, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese. Instead of a few huge players with 500KW shortwave transmitters there are now thousands of Christian radio ministries of all shapes and sizes focused on reaching the nations of the world.

Most of these outreach-oriented radio stations rely on a unique financial model of broadcasters paying for their programs to go to air, plus donations from the listening audience, church and local businesses. Few rely on advertising for the majority of their revenue. This in direct contrast with local Christian radio in the USA which is highly commercialized and relies on advertising revenue as well as donations.

## TYPES OF RADIO STATIONS

The first step in starting a radio station is to decide what type of station you want to create. The type of station you choose will determine the cost of starting and operating your business, the size of your potential

audience, and the types of programming you can offer.

For example, if you want to reach the largest possible audience, you will need to choose a station type that broadcasts on a powerful signal. But, if you are operating on a tight budget, you may need to choose a station type that requires less expensive equipment, such as an internet radio station.

### 1. AM Radio Station

An AM radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on the AM frequency band. AM stands for Amplitude Modulation and it was one of the first types of radio signals used for broadcasting.

AM radio signals are transmitted using a carrier wave that is modulated in amplitude. The amplitude of the signal is varied to encode the audio information that is being broadcast.

AM radio signals are affected by atmospheric conditions and they can only travel a limited distance before they dissipate. For this reason, AM radio stations typically have a smaller coverage area than FM radio stations.

- Operates in the Medium Frequency (MF) band, usually from 530 kHz to 1700 kHz.
- Large coverage area especially at night, hundreds to thousands of kilometers.
- Susceptible to interference, best for talk radio, news, sports broadcasting and preaching.

### 2. FM Radio Station

An FM radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on the FM frequency band. FM stands for Frequency Modulation and it is the most common type of radio signal used for broadcasting.

FM radio signals are transmitted using a carrier wave that is modulated in frequency. The frequency of the signal is varied to encode the audio information that is being broadcast.

FM radio signals are not affected by atmospheric conditions and they can travel long distances without dissipating. For this reason, FM radio stations typically have a larger coverage area than AM radio stations.

- Operates in the Very High Frequency (VHF) band, from 88 MHz to 108 MHz.
- Clear sound quality, not subject to interference, good for music and entertainment
- Smaller coverage area (less than 100km radius), line of sight only.

### 3. Shortwave Radio Station

A shortwave radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on the shortwave frequency band. Shortwave signals are transmitted using a network of high-frequency radio waves.

Shortwave radio signals can travel long distances without dissipating. However, they are substantially affected by atmospheric and ionospheric conditions and can "hiss and crackle".

- Typically operates in the frequency range of 3 MHz to 30 MHz. It is part of the HF (High Frequency) band.
- Variable sound quality (sometimes subject to interference)
- Very large coverage area, can broadcast internationally into creative access nations.
- Requires more expensive equipment and sometimes consume large amounts of power.
- Requires a frequency license

### 4. Microbroadcasting Radio Station

A microbroadcasting radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts on a very low power FM signal.

- Low cost
- Reaches up to 15km, so they can be helpful in a dense crowded area such as a slum.
- Requires a low-power FM signal
- May or may not require a broadcast license, depending on the nation.
- Have been covertly used in UPGs

### 5. DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting) – key points:

- Requires a broadcasting license
- Broadcasting distance depends on how many multiplexes a radio station belongs to
- Multiple radio stations can be broadcast on one signal
- Has no interference
- Can transmit metadata like song names
- Mainly used in Europe, UK, Australia and Asia

### 6. Satellite Radio Station

A satellite radio station is a type of radio station that broadcasts via a satellite signal. Satellite radio signals are transmitted using a network of satellites in orbit around the Earth.

Satellite radio signals are not affected by atmospheric conditions and they can travel long distances without dissipating. For this reason, satellite radio stations have a very large coverage area.

- Clear sound quality
- Very large coverage area
- Requires a subscription to receive the signal
- Difficult to jam or intercept so has been used to share the gospel in areas where it is normally restricted.

### 7. Internet Radio

- Does not require a broadcasting license
- Can broadcast anywhere in the world
- Unlimited number of radio stations possible
- Wide range of genres and types
- Can transmit metadata like song names
- Available on a wide range of devices such as smartphones, computers, and other connected devices.

## STRUCTURING YOUR CHRISTIAN RADIO PROGRAM

Every program should have a strong intro, strong outro with a call to action, and an interesting topic that fits the time, genre and the audience. The intro and outro should be lively, upbeat, brief pre-recorded segments that are attached to the start and the conclusion of the program after editing. Here is a sample structure but feel free to create your own:

*Intro (25 seconds):* (Music rises, then drops) Welcome to PROGRAM TITLE with RADIO HOST where we discuss GENERAL THEME (music increases, and fades out) show starts

*Outro (45 seconds):* (Program concludes, music rises, music fades as voice starts) Thank you for listening to PROGRAM TITLE with RADIO HOST please go to our website where you can CALL TO ACTION and FINAL BLESSING (Music briefly increases, then fades)

The first fifteen seconds of the actual program after the intro must create desire, interest and connection. It must create the thought in the mind of the listener such as: "I really need to listen to this broadcast, right now!" You can do this by:

1. Vividly describing a problem that listeners want solved
2. Asking a curious question about something people want to know
3. Making an outrageous assertion and then proving it in the program
4. Speaking about a highly interesting niche topic that is relevant to your audience
5. Giving a great sermon illustration or story that gets listeners engaged with the topic
6. Illustrating an error and then saying you will show them the actual biblical truth: "you have heard it said, but I say unto you..."
7. Read a brief but powerful Bible verse, especially one with a great promise from the Lord
8. State a symptom, e.g. "are you ever anxious about money", elucidate the symptom so that they can feel it for themselves, then promise them relief (think headache pill advertisement)
9. Create light tension, banter or conflict between the radio hosts (if you have multiple people on the show)
10. Say something relatable and human that leads in to the topic: "Well, it is really hot here in Atlanta and we have a sizzling hot program for you today where we will be addressing the topic of..."

Once you have got the audience interested then you have to structure the radio program in a way that maintains interest throughout the broadcast. There are many possible formats such as: playing Christian music, doing in-person interviews, responding to

listener submissions (vetted beforehand), Biblical exposition, topical sermons, Christian commentary on the news, human interest situations, prayer and worship, evangelism, deliverance, healing, listener call-in with problems and questions, giving a Christian take on business and finances, cultural events: food, travel, Christians and technology, "agony aunt" relationships questions, and niche programs such as interesting topics from church history.

You can mix these formats, for instance you can play some music then take a phone call from a listener with a question for the local pastor.

Your audience determines your format. In Uganda programs with evangelism, healing and deliverance are popular, however I would probably keep a church history segment for an audience in a university town in Europe!

Music can be very local. Listeners will turn off if the music is strange to them. I know of a Christian radio station in Francophone (French-speaking) West Africa that broadcasts classical music and old hymns in English. The local Christians think it is terrible!

You cannot just broadcast whatever you like, whatever you think is good. You have to broadcast what the audience thinks is good and will listen to! This means that you have to research your audience demographics beforehand!

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**We are seeing the rapid rise of local AM/FM stations and Internet radio that allows local Christians in emerging nations to create their own radio programs at a fraction of the cost. Even if a Western preacher is given radio time to help fund the station, the local station still has the power to insist on certain topics or types of content.**

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It is a good idea to have a clear call to action which may be doing an evangelistic call, praying a prayer, phoning in on a certain number, sending an email to the radio station, sending in a donation or visiting a website and leaving questions and comments.

Of course, you should also close with something along the lines of "remember to tune in next week, same time, same station". You may need to check your calls to action with the radio station if you broadcast in the USA, as some FCC regulations ban calls to action for public radio and college campus and community radio.

Just a quick note: you may have to check for copyright issues, especially if you are broadcasting contemporary Christian music.

## LIVE OR PRE-RECORDED?

I pre-record my shows because it allows editing, is less stressful and I can then upload them to my website later on. This is fine since I mainly do Bible teaching and do not have guests or call-ins. That said, I prefer being a guest on a live program than pre-recording something in my studio. There is better “energy” to it and I think the audience prefers it. The Radio King blog has a good post about this issue: <https://www.radioking.com/blog/is-pre-recorded-or-live-radio-content-better/>

Live is more authentic, has better engagement, has real time interaction and is less time-consuming because there is no post-production editing. However, it is prone to gaffes and mistakes, has less audio quality and is high pressure. It also has an inflexible schedule because you have to be on-air at a certain time.

Pre-recorded audio has a more flexible schedule (you can record at any time), is generally of a higher audio quality, allows editing and post-production to remove gaffes and glitches. However, it can lose timeliness if say, political issues and new events are being discussed. Pre-recorded allows you to schedule ahead and to control availability, for example, I can have shows lined up for when I am travelling.

## ENCULTURATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

It is my view that it is totally inappropriate to directly translate well-known American preachers and call it missionary radio! Fortunately, this practice is rapidly changing! We are seeing the rapid rise of local AM/FM stations and Internet radio that allows local Christians in emerging nations to create their own radio programs at a fraction of the cost. Even if a Western preacher is given radio time to help fund the station, the local station still has the power to insist on certain topics or types of content.

The current plague of prosperity gospel preachers on radio is slowly being addressed, not just by the church but also by various national governments in emerging nations that want to control religious scams operating on their soil. The goal of sound theology and biblical teaching in a highly-contextualized local format with indigenous broadcasters is slowly being realized!

## SOFTWARE, EQUIPMENT AND AI

The cost of producing a good radio program has dropped! It is possible to buy affordable microphones, podcast mixers and record directly to a computer. You just need a quiet room and some sound cushioning tiles. There are numerous articles online about the kind of equipment you require, such as: <https://live365.com/blog/what-is-a-radio-studio-what-equipment-does-it-need/>

A photo of my setup is below:



Audacity, which is a free audio editing program has recently improved to the point of being a commercial solution so that I have been able to move fully away from paid software. You can download Audacity from the following link: <https://www.audacityteam.org/download/>

There are AI voice generators and AI music generators that can help you with producing intro and outro clips, background music and advertisements. You just enter a text prompt and the AI software will generate the audio clip or music clip for you! It does take some practice though.

These AI programs are constantly changing and it is best to do a bit of research before settling on which software you will use. I use some AI programs that I purchased through AppSumo which is an outlet for discounted software.

## CONCLUSION

Radio can play a vital role in Great Commission outreach, especially outreach to oral learners. Radio is affordable, universal and well understood, and does not require the purchase of special equipment. New forms of radio such as Internet radio and radio apps on mobile phones are breathing new life into a one-hundred-year-old medium of gospel communication.



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