

Radio TechCheck

The Weekly NAB Newsletter for Radio Broadcast Engineers



NAB LABS

FM Radio in Smartphone Advances with Sprint and NextRadio

In January of this year, cellular network service provider Sprint [announced](#) a landmark arrangement with the radio industry that promised to increase the number and functionality of FM radio in smartphone-enabled devices. As year-end approaches, this arrangement is bearing fruit as Sprint deploys devices with the [NextRadio FM tuner application](#) and makes it easier than ever for consumer in the U.S. to learn about and purchase these devices.

Currently, Sprint has seven smartphones which come with an activated FM radio chip and the NextRadio FM tuner application: the [LG G2](#), [HTC One](#), [HTC One Max](#), [HTC EVO 4G LTE](#), [Samsung Galaxy Note 3](#), [Samsung Galaxy Mega](#), and [Samsung Galaxy S 4 Mini](#) smartphones. When consumers go to the Sprint Web page, the new phone search tool now includes “FM Radio (NextRadio)” in the list of searchable features as shown in the graphic below. For the Washington, DC zip code 20036, on November 15, 2013, such a search identified the five phones shown in the graphic below at right (search results will be location specific and subject to the phones which are currently in stock).

The screenshot shows the Sprint website's phone search interface. On the left, a sidebar titled "What type of device are you looking for?" includes filters for Price, Deals, Operating System, Key Features, and Condition. The "Key Features" section has "FM Radio (NextRadio®)" checked, highlighted with a red box and a red arrow. The main area displays five smartphone listings:

- Samsung Galaxy S® 4 mini**: \$0.00, 4G LTE, ANDROID™ 4.2 (JELLY BEAN)
- Samsung Galaxy Mega™**: \$99.99, 4G LTE, ANDROID™ 4.2 (JELLY BEAN)
- Samsung Galaxy Note® 3**: \$249.99, ANDROID™ 4.3 (JELLY BEAN), 89 Reviews
- HTC One®**: \$99.99, 1102 Reviews
- HTC EVO™ 4G LTE**: \$0.00, 2105 Reviews

Each listing includes a "Compare this device" button and icons for SYSTEM, DISPLAY, BATTERY, TOUCH, and CAMERA.

NextRadio is also available on the [HTC Desire](#) smartphone as offered by pre-paid cellular service provider Virgin Mobile. A screen shot from the Virgin Mobile web page is shown below, stating that " For endless music and your local DJ faves, tune in to FM radio right from your phone with the NextRadio app."

When a consumer uses the NextRadio app on these phones and listens to an FM station, they can encounter a rich, interactive “hybrid radio” experience which will depend upon the level of support the broadcaster is providing. The data and interactive content portions of the user experience are supported by the Emmis Communications-developed [TagStation](#), a cloud-based engine that offers stations the ability to upload branding images that will display as default artwork in the NextRadio app, as well as call letters, format, station name and slogan.

Emmis offers a basic, free level of integration to all FM stations which results in the station’s logo being displayed and creates a compelling experience within the app as the user is able to quickly associate their local stations with the station logo while browsing. Broadcasters interested in taking advantage of this free service can sign up for it [here](#). For greater functionality, a broadcaster needs to purchase the TagStation full data service, which enables synchronization of broadcast audio with album art, metadata and enhanced, interactive advertising and other services. According to an [Emmis press release](#) last August, more than 1,500 stations have signed up for the free services and Beasley, CBS Radio, Entercom, Greater Media and Hubbard have registered for the additional services through TagStation.

Google Play is also offering the [NextRadio app](#) for download as shown in the graphic at right. At present this app works on the seven phones listed above. The number of supported phones will increase as new devices are launched. Key features of the app as listed on Google Play include the following:

- Tune in to local FM stations on your phone

- Find radio stations by genre or frequency in the Guide
- Uses 90% less data than streaming music
- Get 3X better battery life compared to streaming music
- See artwork and song information while you listen (stations using TagStation only)
- Buy the song you just heard right from your phone (stations using TagStation only)
- Get a list of recently played songs (stations using TagStation only)
- Give feedback on the songs you like or dislike (stations using TagStation only)
- Share what you're listening to on Facebook or Twitter (stations using TagStation only)

Also noted is the fact that the NextRadio app uses the headphone cord or an auxiliary cable as an antenna to receive local FM radio signals. The app features the option to send audio to the phone's speaker but the cord must remain plugged in to receive FM signals.

Just last week, advertising management software company WideOrbit [announced](#) the integration of WO Automation for Radio with NextRadio and TagStation, to support visually enhanced free radio on select Sprint smartphones (listed above). WideOrbit says that this integration "...provides an enhanced experience to listeners, new revenue opportunities to radio stations through advertiser-sponsored content, and places stations on par with other music apps that deliver album content and other interactive elements."

The integration of WO Automation for Radio with TagStation, which according to WideOrbit will be available January 2014, allows WideOrbit radio automation clients to deliver the title, artist and other music content information, in addition to visual ads and promos, along with their FM radio broadcasts to listeners' phones through the NextRadio platform.

Currently, TagStation's on-air system integration support includes Broadcast Electronics [TRE](#), ArcticPALM's [Center Stage Live](#), and ENCO's [PADapult](#) systems.

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