

Radio TechCheck

The Weekly NAB Newsletter for Radio Broadcast Engineers



NAB LABS

U.K. Backs Away from FM Shut-off

A number of recent developments affecting radio in the United Kingdom are worthy of notice by U.S. broadcasters. First, although a number of European countries have hinted at partial or complete shutdown of analog FM broadcasting at some roughly defined point in the future, the U.K. had been the most aggressive on the point, with regulators there having initially set 2015 as the target date for phasing out analog FM and instituting a mandatory switchover to DAB. (More recently some U.K. broadcasters had called for the date to be delayed to 2018.) But last week, U.K. Communications Minister Ed Vaizey announced that plans for an analog FM radio shut-off had been postponed indefinitely. While the possibility remained that a switch-off plan might be re-introduced at some later time, the U.K. government's current position includes no scheduled end date for analog FM service. Some U.K. broadcasters that are already providing DAB service in parallel to their analog channels had hoped that the transition would come to pass in 2018 or thereabouts, so they could reduce the cost of such dual operations, with DAB uptake by consumers being driven by a looming mandatory shutdown of analog FM radio. But many other broadcasters there—mostly local independent stations that currently provide only analog FM service—welcomed the government's turnabout.

Recent audience research in the U.K. indicates that DAB currently accounts for about 35% of radio listening countrywide—despite digital radio covering about 94% of the country's area with national (BBC) service, and about 70% coverage by local DAB stations. Minister Vaizey said until 50% of U.K. radio listening took place via digital services, the issue of analog FM shutdown would not be reconsidered, although others in the U.K. government are calling for that trigger to be set at 75%. Importantly, such digital listening is not strictly limited to DAB service in the U.K., since digital radio services are also carried on terrestrial and satellite DTV platforms there.

Notwithstanding the government's decision, a number of other concurrent developments in the region spoke to the continuing (albeit slow) growth of digital radio services worldwide. Chipmaker Frontier Silicon, headquartered in the U.K., announced details of its *Chorus 4* next-generation digital radio chip. In addition to its single-chip approach—integrating RF front-end, baseband, application processor and digital-to-analog converter—it features support for AM, FM, DAB, DAB+, HD Radio and Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM) formats, along with low power consumption suitable for battery-powered receivers. On the latter point, the manufacturer claims battery-life performance of digital radios based on the new chip could be comparable to analog-only radios.

Another announcement from STMicroelectronics and U.K.-based Imagination Technologies concerned a similar new generation of multi-standard (DAB and HD Radio) receivers specifically targeting the automotive market.

The trend toward singular global solutions for multiple digital radio standards would appear to facilitate the medium's overall development worldwide despite regional fragmentation of formats, and

could continue to reduce the cost and operating differentials between digital and legacy analog radio receivers.

Yet even as the vanguard among the world's countries for digital radio adoption, the U.K.'s recent regulatory ruling underscores the durability and continuing mid-to long-term importance of analog FM radio broadcasting.

For more information on the U.K. decision on analog FM shutoff click [here](#). For more information on the Frontier Silicon IC, click [here](#). For more information on the STMicroelectronics and Imagination Technologies agreement click [here](#).

NAB Show @ Mobile World Congress – Capturing the Moment Through Mobile and Broadcast – NAB Show will present a two-day symposium as part of the 2014 Mobile World Congress' mPowered Industries media conference. The symposium, sponsored by Ericsson, will be held 25 and 26 February 2014 in Barcelona. Leaders in mobile communications, digital and mainstream media will explore how content and advanced delivery options are driving entertainment experiences on mobile devices. [Click here](#) for more details.

NAB Show @ CABSAT – The Changing Landscape of Broadcasting – NAB Shows has partnered with the Dubai World Trade Center (DWTC) to produce the 2014 CABSAT Conference. Celebrating its 20th anniversary, CABSAT is the region's leading annual event focusing on the broadcast, satellite and media industry. The two-day conference (11 & 12 March 2014) will attract attendees from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia who are actively engaged in the creation, management and delivery of entertainment and news content.

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