

France: digital survey

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The primary purpose of this survey is to check that the radio players want to embark on this adventure.*



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The French broadcasting council (CSA) has decided to carry out a public survey prior to the allocation of rights to use the electromagnetic spectrum for broadcasting radio services in digital mode. To make it easier to deploy digital radio the CSA would like to find out about the plans and expectations of market players in the technical, editorial, and economic sectors.

Radio is a popular medium in France: 99.1% of households own at least one radio set, the average number of radios per household is 5.6, and radio audience levels remain high.

Almost 6,000 frequencies, shared between the public service and the private sector, are planned in FM. On average, every listener receives over 20 stations although there is great territorial disparity: roughly 50 stations broadcast in the greater Paris region, while 30% of the population receive less than 10 stations.

The introduction of digital radio aims to improve the offer of content and services by increasing the number of stations available to the public, greater diversity of content with the arrival of new formats enriched with associated data, and an improvement in sound quality. Digitization could enable the coverage zones to be extended for existing services. To achieve these objectives, the technical aspects of radio digitization need to be examined, and especially the ability of each standard to ensure portable and mobile reception.

Organization

The survey is intended for service editors, service distributors, broadcast providers and operators, radio equipment manufacturers and, more generally, anyone working directly with the radio sector.

France and abroad

In France, the radio sector (editors, broadcasters, industry, control body),

within the DAB Club, started promoting DAB in 1991. The DAB Club ran the operational implementation of the first DAB transmissions and contributed to the experimental legal framework.

The CSA issued three calls for tender for digital terrestrial radio, the last of which was not carried through to completion. After the first two calls for tender, issued in 1996 and 1998, the CSA authorized the use of three L-band multiplexes in Paris, Lyons, Marseilles, Nantes, and Toulouse. The multiplexes generally comprised six stations already in FM. A third call for tender was issued in Paris in 2000. The Council decided to allow for nine blocks but was not able to see this through as the law stated that authorizations could not be granted or agreements signed after 1 January 2002. In addition, the Council had authorized a motorway experiment on a section of the A 10 near Poitiers.

Several technical trials were carried out in France, in DRM in particular to study the conditions for simulcasting an analogue signal and a digital signal.

Finally, the Council authorized the experimental broadcasting of radio services in DVB-T in July 2004 then in February 2005.

Worldspace and Alcatel Space also carried out experiments on the Afristar satellite that covers some of France, adding terrestrial re-broadcast equipment in Paris.

The first four questions in the public survey are, moreover, devoted to the outcome of these experiments and the operational consequences that might result from them.

Digital radio already exists in other countries, where several different technologies are used (DAB, IBOC, satellite, DMB, DTT). Several



countries have chosen to use DAB as their digital radio platform. Broadcast networks covering more than 50% of the country exist in several European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Britain, Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany). Radio services are also broadcast using DAB in Canada and Singapore.

Britain

In 1994 the British government chose to launch digital radio in DAB on band III. Digital radio was rolled out in two stages. The two national multiplexes (BBC and Digital One) were launched between 1995 and 1999 and they currently cover about 85% of the population broadcasting more than 20 radio stations, the majority of which are exclusively on digital networks.

From 2000 local multiplexes were allocated and there are now 46

offering about 400 stations. Sales of digital receivers are on the increase: by the end of 2003, 435,000 had already been bought. By January 2005 the number had jumped to 1,200,000 digital receivers sold. Research on the digital receiver market forecast the number of sets to be sold by 2008 at 13 millions (source DRDB, Digital Radio Development Bureau).

In tandem, approximately 30 stations are broadcast in DVB-T on DTT (source: Freeview).

Germany

DAB was launched in L-band and band III in 1999. Regional multiplexes cover roughly 85% of the population and owing to the political and administrative structure in Germany there are no national multiplexes. The digital offer comprises 40 public stations and more than 50 private radio stations. About 100,000 receivers have been sold since DAB was launched (source WorldDAB).

Additionally, a bouquet of 30 radio stations is due to be launched soon on DTT in Berlin.

North America

Digital radio is being developed in the USA as a subscriber service (the monthly subscription is USD 13) with mixed satellite and terrestrial transmission. There are two commercial operators on the market, each broadcasting a bouquet of roughly 150 theme stations, without

advertising. Roughly 4,500,000 people have subscribed to one or other of these satellite services, and partnerships with the car industry encourage radio bouquets (sources: Sirius and XM). Satellite radio services also exist in Canada.

The USA has chosen the IBOC standard for terrestrial transmissions, and these are currently at the experimental stage.

Asia

No standard has yet been deployed for the general public on the Asian markets. Digital radio is in the experimental stage in Japan which has opted for the ISDB-T standard. Korea is attempting to develop broadcasting of multimedia services in DMB, a standard derived from DAB. Finally, China has decided to deploy a DRM broadcast network for stations broadcasting on AM (source: DRM Consortium). It plans to manufacture millions of cheap receivers for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

30 questions

The questionnaire comprises about 30 questions about the outcome of experiments, the economic model, and new uses expected of broadcast digitization, technical aspects and the organization of calls for candidates for the deployment of digital radio services.

The questionnaire is available in French on www.csa.fr

Sources: CSA / le Monde



Address <http://www.csa.fr/index.php>

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