

Radio group plans anti-DAB ad

UKRD-led campaign would highlight embarrassing split over platform, as Digital Radio UK launches 'biggest ever' push

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"[Digital radio](#), more to love" says the official [BBC](#)-backed Christmas advertising campaign for digital audio broadcasting (DAB) radio. But commercial operators who have doubts about the new technology are planning a rival campaign telling listeners: "A DAB radio may be for Christmas but might not be for life".

The conflicting ad campaigns threaten to bring the [radio industry split over the suitability of DAB](#) as the long-term replacement for analogue FM to a much wider public in the most embarrassing and confusing way possible.

Tensions between the BBC and the commercial sector over [who will pay for DAB rollout](#) came to a head last month when companies including Global Radio and Bauer Radio [declined to run the official marketing campaign](#) promoting the new platform until the corporation agreed to invest more in it.

The disagreement encompasses fears about the cost to consumers and confusion over [who will fund the rollout of the DAB transmitter network](#), estimated to cost between £100m and £200m and seen as crucial to the platform's success.

William Rogers, the chief executive of the [commercial radio](#) group UKRD, is the driving force behind the proposed rival ad campaign inspired by the slogan "[A dog is for life, not just for Christmas](#)".

"There has been a lot of pressure put on us by a lot of operators to launch an alternative to the [\[Digital Radio UK\] campaign](#) which we are seriously considering," said Rogers.

"It is built around the idea that a DAB radio may be for Christmas but it might not be for life. It would be intended to point out that people need to be absolutely certain before they buy a DAB radio that they have a signal, that it is of adequate strength and quality and that the stations they presently listen to [on analogue] are available on the DAB platform.

"A number of radio operators have been in discussion with us about whether a campaign is appropriate to run at this moment and we will be considering a launch very shortly."

DAB coverage across the country falls a long way short of the availability of FM, but funding for the full rollout of the digital signal across national and local DAB multiplexes was not included in the [recent BBC licence fee settlement](#). Commercial operators are reluctant to spend money on DAB multiplexes that are not commercially viable.

UKRD owns 15 local stations and has been in discussion with seven other operators representing about 16 radio stations about running the ad campaign, which it is understood would be voiced by a well known TV personality.

Rogers added: "I want to inject some honesty into the debate about people's purchase of a DAB radio. There clearly needs to be some sort of campaign to explain the reality behind DAB."

It was a sign of the sensitivity of the on-going negotiations involving the BBC, commercial radio trade body the Radio Centre and digital radio switchover body Digital Radio UK that a [Westminster forum on the future of digital radio due to take place next Tuesday \(7 December\)](#) has been postponed until April next year.

Executives from both commercial radio and the BBC who had been due to appear are understood to have dropped out because of ongoing negotiations.

The government yesterday looked to address some of the commercial sector's concerns in a [critical report by a government advisory body that cast doubt on the prospects for digital radio switchover by 2015](#) and warned the industry not to "bully" or "scare" consumers into buying the new technology.

The 2015 target date was "secondary to the satisfaction of the switchover criteria", which includes that more than 50% of listening must be via digital platforms before the switchover process begins in earnest.

"However, a target date is a useful mechanism to galvanise the industry and provide a focal point that the sector can work towards," the report added.

The government, in its response to the Consumer Expert Group yesterday, said yesterday: "Government has been very clear in its view that broadcasters, particularly the BBC, need to do more to improve [DAB] coverage over the next two years."

A cost-benefit analysis of digital radio, and research into consumers' willingness to pay for the new technology is due to be submitted to the government by the end of 2011.

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