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Subject: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Thu, 30 Sep 2021 22:01:30 GMT

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Mini-Rant Warning:

I am really angry with the internet radio I have now, and the irresponsible companies that have brought its demise. So if you're having a happy day, don't read on. :evil:

I have a Grace Digital radio that recently stopped working. It's not just a table radio, but is a tuner that I use as part of my hi-fi system. I never expected it to be truly high-fidelity, but I did expect it to be good source of convenient background music. Broadcast radio isn't what I'd consider to be super high-quality either. So any tuner is mostly just good for background music, in my opinion. To be honest though, I did hope that there were a few stations/sources that streamed high-quality material, but again, that was not really a requirement, more a "stretch goal." I did, however, expect it to at least work.

And that's what makes me angry. Internet radios depend on servers, and sometimes, those servers aren't owned by companies that last. So if you buy an internet radio, there's a chance that the thing won't be even servicable in a few years. That's happened to me twice now, once by C.Crane company and once by Grace Digital.

To be honest, C.Crane has been selling high-quality analog radios for quite some time, and I really like them. So I ordered an internet table radio from them, back when I first moved to Bella Vista, where I am surrounded by hills. It didn't cost too much, and it let me tune in stuff I could receive in Tulsa (on the plains) but that I could never receive in the Ozark mountains where I now live. It worked for many years, but eventually became worthless after the service provider of the streaming platform went out of business. The radio became a brick.

I noticed C.Crane stopped stocking internet radios after that, so maybe they're avoiding internet radio products until manufacturers create a business/technical model that prevents this kind of problem in the future.

You might think I would have learned from that experience, but instead, I assumed that manufacturers must have already learned this, by the time my C.Crane table radio stopped working. I figured they could see how vulnerable this industry is, and surely they would have started making business arrangements and/or configurable endpoints so their radios could be changed to whatever servers are available. So I set out to find a really nice internet-streaming receiver I could use with my stereo system. I found a nice looking unit with all the features I wanted made by Grace Digital in 2015.

It worked just fine until a few weeks ago, when I powered it up expecting to find my Pandora stations. Nothing, no Pandora. I reset the receiver. Nothing. I reset the router. Nada. So I found other material to listen to and went about my business, knowing I needed to write Grace Digital and ask what to do for service.

This is the reply I got:

Quote:Unfortunately your unit will stop being supported by the 3rd party service provider, Qualcomm Inc. This will affect Grace Digital internet radios manufactured between the years of 2007 and 2017 including the original Mondo. (Please note; the Mondo Plus, Mondo Classic, and Mondo Elite are not affected).

The managed shut down began on November 4th, 2020 and will be completed by September 13th, 2021.

Here is a brief explanation why this is happening.

From 2007-2017, our radios and most radios on the market used to connect to servers of Receiva, who is a third party company.

On 2017, we decided to create our own database to stop relying on a third party company to handle the internet streams, and bring those services in-house so we could provide a better service to our customers. For over four years we have been working with our own resources and we even have new radio models.

What changed? Basically 2020, it was a very difficult year.

Unfortunately, this year Receiva announced back in January that they are closing business, and that means that they will shut down the servers that your radio uses to connect to the internet. We tried to strike a deal with them to keep the old radios working, but before we could even finish the conversation Reciva sold out to Qualcom, that decided to shut down the business Your unit will stop connecting to all services.

You have 2 options:

1- From Grace digital, we understand that this is affecting you directly, so if you wish to upgrade your radio, we can offer you a 35% discount code off our new models, available here:

<https://gracedigital.com/collections/radios-tuners-amps>

(At the moment we are sold out. We will send you an email notification when we restock if you reply back to this communication).

The code is:

CCUP35

The discount code will be available and will work through this entire year, so we do not put any pressure and you can use it at your earliest convenience.

2- When your radio is shut down by the third party provider the menus on your radio will change and many items will no longer be accessible. However, based on the current information provided to Grace Digital the presets will continue to function for basic internet radio stations.

If you would like to continue use of your legacy radio please program your favorite 10 stations to your presets (This had to be done before 9/20/2021 as the option might not be available anymore). However, please note this strategy will only work with standard radio stations. Pandora, and SiriusXM will NOT function on a saved preset as the 3rd party servers are required for those services to function properly.

Please do not factory reset your unit, it will stop working all together.

Great. My Grace Digital radio has become just another brick. And they don't even make a receiver anymore, just cheap little table radios.

I think I'm done with internet radios for a while.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios  
Posted by [Barryso](#) on Thu, 30 Sep 2021 23:01:32 GMT  
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Hi Wayne,

Sorry about the devices going dark. Have you considered open source?

Been using a Raspberry Pi and suitable add on boards for for streaming for several years. Allo makes nice dacs and spdif boards to use with the Pi. None of it is expensive and it all improves nicely with inexpensive linear power supplies.

Using Moode Audio software on it. It streams internet stations and music from the ripped cd's on a local hard drive. It likely doesn't have all the features you're used to but it's open source and doesn't rely on specific servers to operate properly.

I don't use services like Tidal, Spotify or Qobuz and it's likely you'd have to use something like bubbleupnp over dlna for those streams. A kludge but it would work.

Besides, it's named Pi. If you go that route you'd have a Pi music server and Pi speakers.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Thu, 30 Sep 2021 23:05:04 GMT  
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Yeah, I have a Raspberry Pi and I often do little projects on it with my son.

But I'm still mad at Grace Digital and all the other internet radio manufacturers. It's a damn shame that they can't get it sorted.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 01 Oct 2021 17:27:32 GMT

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I was thinking about our discussion last night, and it occurred to me that your point dovetails and highlights my point. Your comments suggest a viable solution, and I guess that's what surprises me most about these internet radio manufacturers: Why don't they embrace that approach instead of making and selling products that are so vulnerable to obsolescence?

Maybe I should make one. I tend to use development systems like the Raspberry Pi solely for proof-of-concept, and once a design starts to materialize, I trim down to the processor, memory and I/O needed. So I wouldn't probably use an off-the-shelf development system and instead would have boards made with the specific subsystems and components desired.

But honestly, I have my hands pretty full. I make specialized devices and equipment for large companies and it keeps me busy. My customers order way more devices than I would ever sell to a consumer market, so I tend to keep audio as a side-business/hobby. Probably means I won't end up doing this. But after seeing the way Grace Digital has gone, I definitely do think about it. I think there's a market for it.

Hey - speakin' of the Raspberry Pi - have you downloaded my little Jinx text adventure game for the Raspberry Pi? If you haven't seen the post, give it a gander. I think it's worth a few minutes typing, just for fun. :)

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Barryso](#) on Sat, 02 Oct 2021 13:23:44 GMT

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Hi Wayne,

Sorry to interrupt your rant. 'Twas excellent.

I get your point about the complete absence of long term reliability. So here's my rant ... poor reliability seems to be the way of things now and it likely comes from companies prioritizing this quarters profit over long term company stability. It's easy to come up with quick solutions that won't last but do nice things to this quarter (or next quarters) profit while disregarding any long term customer satisfaction. By the time the thing breaks the company may or may not still be in business anymore but the management team likely will be completely different. The first team made their profit and the cleanup and poor reputation has fallen on the new folks. They continue

on with the same bad decisions.

Companies don't grow and last and prosper if they don't look after their customers.

I never recommend the raspberry pi music servers to anyone who isn't a tech. Every now and again there's a minor glitch that requires a low level tech skills to fix. Easy for a tech but too much for non techs. So a solution like you are talking about, a well designed and executed finished product, would be right for the majority of people. No idea how to sell such a thing or how many people might be inclined to buy it.

But the sound quality of the off the self Pi (using the Allo boards, linear power supplies and a bit of tweaking to the sox rendering and input buffer settings) is FAR better than it has any right to be. Cheap, quick and sounds good. If you're just looking for an easy music server for your own (evil) use then it's a fine choice.

OK, it's your turn to rant now.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sat, 02 Oct 2021 15:25:24 GMT

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I'm so with you on that, Barry. I often remark how newer devices tend to sacrifice reliability for features. It's like people these days are OK with phones that drop-out in the middle of calls or lose the connection entirely. Lose power in your home and your land line stops working. But that's OK, use the cell. Hopefully it will work, and not drop-out too.

Fifty years ago, people in the USA were accustomed to having a phone network that almost never went down. It was the most reliable network I've ever seen.

Now days, phones suck. But you can play games on 'em. Provided the download works.

Same seems to be true of almost every other consumer digital electronics product.

Don't get me wrong - I love all the new tech - it's just that I'm amazed how unreliable some stuff is. As an engineer, I never sacrifice quality and reliability for added features. Add the features but keep the reliability or re-think the features and don't introduce them until they can be made robust.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Rusty](#) on Sat, 02 Oct 2021 17:25:42 GMT

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If engineers had their way things would sure be different. The CEO's & Board of Directors have the say unfortunately. I used to think Boeing was the trusted leader in aircraft design and safety.

The 737 Max disaster changed all that. A token of accountability with the CEO bailing out in his golden parachute. No real legal judgement for this boardroom debacle came to be. Shocker. I'd pause to be riding in one of them things now. Like Mickey Jupp sang.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxArTAKiCoA>

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sun, 03 Oct 2021 14:41:44 GMT

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Not in this case, I'm afraid. I work around a lot of younger engineers, developers, project managers, testers and "user-experience" folks. There's a definite shift of emphasis in their mindsets. Some of it is generational, and some is what's coming out of the schools. A lot of it is the fact that we have let certain industries lapse, thinking we can buy from other countries cheaper than we can make ourselves.

No, America has lost a lot of its engineering talent. And what's left often is more passionate about gadgetry and new features than they are in building and maintaining robust infrastructure. It's more exciting to them to make stuff that "looks neat" than it is to make stuff that is durable and reliable.

I do agree with you though too, in the fact that a lot of American companies have chosen to outsource manufacturing to other countries and this has had a huge impact. It's not just that engineers have chosen to lose skillsets, it's also partially that they aren't needed if the companies that employ them don't require the skillsets 'cause they are outsourcing. That's a big part of the problem, in my opinion.

But still, I think my big beef right now is not so much on that aspect as it is with companies (and the engineers that work for them) designing equipment that isn't reliable and won't last in the long run. So much throw-away junk these days.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Rusty](#) on Sun, 03 Oct 2021 18:36:29 GMT

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Yes sir it's a shame. Unfortunately for my view, there's too many connections that confirm what the heavy thinkers are saying about the erosion taking place. Time and neglect takes it's toll. We still have NASA, that I think is doing great engineering with unmanned exploration and science. The James Webb telescope getting ready to go. Stuff to be proud of the integrity we still have. Elon Musk, eccentric as he is, is a billionaire at least that develops and makes things.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Mon, 04 Oct 2021 13:45:22 GMT

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I saw an interview with the Tesla Motors founders, Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning, and I was impressed with those two guys. They were at the right place in time to develop a good electric car, and theirs truly is a good product. Before then, you really couldn't make a good electric car with lead-acid batteries. So technologies had converged and the time was right for making a decent electric car.

And really, from a user perspective, I think all the American car manufacturers are making better cars now than they were 30 years ago. This is an industry that is an exception to the complaints above, in my opinion.

It's consumer electronics that I'm so disappointed with. Not all, of course, there are some exceptions in electronics too. They tend to come from niche markets like tube amps. Of course those markets have good products, because the makers tend to be passionate and engaged.

But for the most part - especially digital devices - I'm seeing a bunch of disposable junk that isn't even completely working when it hits the retailer's shelves. If it can't connect to the internet to download the latest dozen bugfixes and patches, it's a useless brick. And it will again be a useless brick in just a few short years because it's junk that depends on a fragile infrastructure.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Rusty](#) on Mon, 04 Oct 2021 14:46:19 GMT

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Does that include cell phones? I wonder because I have one that I find out is incompatible with seemingly any plan. I'm truly primitive with communication technology. I'd let my pre pay plan lapse before the pandemic and have never bothered hooking into another plan until recently. Story short, a perfectly good, (I guess) phone from 2012 is now useless. And I don't need or want use of data. I'll end up getting a geezer flip phone of some kind. But this struck me as a planned obsolescence type of engineering.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Mon, 04 Oct 2021 17:29:12 GMT

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Oh, yeah, cell phones are my number one complaint. A close second is VoIP. Both are awesome technologies, and I enjoy a lot of the new features that have been driven by each of those platforms. But I absolutely hate their reliability and can't believe their lack of hardness. By hardness, I mean the ability to work in all situations. Cell phones and VoIP are both way down on the reliability scale compared to phones of fifty years ago. We've gone backwards in terms of

reliability.

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Subject: Re: Digital Streaming Radios

Posted by [Rusty](#) on Mon, 04 Oct 2021 22:29:37 GMT

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Yeah Wayne. I'll implicate my age. It's a cliché that is well worn. But as I've gotten older, I seemingly crave simpler ways. Less things. Archaic ways over the opposite. With the woodworking that I still do some of. I like using hand tools over power tools. And technology that I once felt would alleviate drudgery and foster new and exciting opportunities, seems to come with it's equal down side. It might be the way it's utilized, such as for profit or efficiency. Going to Home Depot today I griped with a fellow customer about the self checking that's replaced people. It takes longer to get out of there than it was prior. Yup an old rotary dial phone seems not so much quaint, but as you point out. Reliable and no fuss. Especially those old heavy ones. That went roooop going away and awrrrrrr coming back. I wouldn't mind to have a working one of those old beasts, sitting on it's very own pedestal. Alas I have VOIP, (hello, hello, you still there?). I know you love those old radios though. And you've got some dandy's. Working still.

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