

Recasting the radio model, without interruptions



By Leigh Andrews

29 Jun 2015

People's pet hates about radio are relatively simple to understand. It's either a certain DJ's voice that grates their nerves, the intrusive advertising that chops off the tails of their favourite song, or the rather repetitive playlists. Recast, from Labs.fm, is set to revolutionise this - here's how...

What do you do when you just can't find good music on the radio? If you're Richard Oakley, you take matters into your own hands. As owner of South African small company called Labs.fm, he developed an app that solves the problem, no matter whether your musical tastes are more in tune with classical music concertos, hard-hitting rock riffs or mainstream pop ditties.



Richard Oakley

Called Recast, the app accesses playlists of actual radio stations all around the world, and allows users to listen to them as they would a music streaming service, simply skipping over any songs not fitting your present mood. The best part? You access just the music playlists, without the interruption of commercials or DJs.

I pinned Oakley down to find out how exactly he's reset the dial on the traditional radio model...

What is Labs.fm?

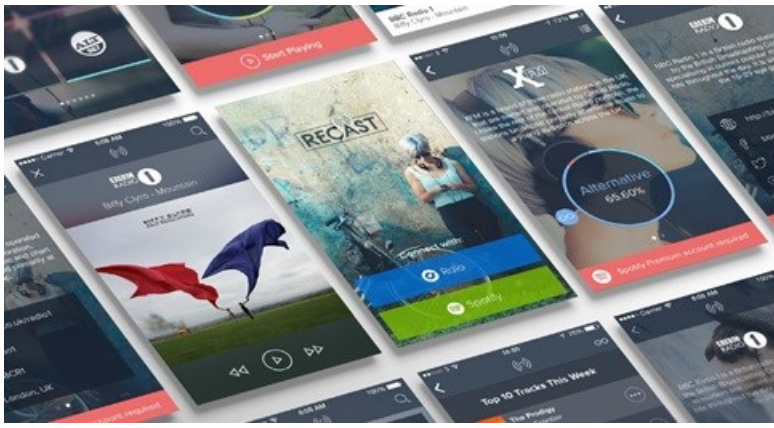
Oakley: I started Labs.fm at the end of last year. Having spent a number of years working in the radio industry, I saw an opportunity to focus on working on ideas that fall between media and technology - a space that is increasingly overlapping - and Recast is the first product we've launched, and is what we're focusing on right now.

■ Explain the concept of 'Recast'.

Oakley: Recast is, very simply, an app that allows listeners to listen to the playlists of radio stations, from all around the world, with the convenience of a streaming music service - they can skip tracks they don't like, save the ones they do, all without any of the ads and presenters that interrupt your music experience when listening to the radio.

It's built on the idea that what people want is a playlist of great music. There's simply nobody that does that better than traditional radio - it's a skill that no algorithm can match - but radio is not designed, first and foremost, as a music experience, and so it comes with a lot of inconvenience and interruptions. So Recast is about replacing that with a great music experience.

As always, a name seems much cleverer in retrospect than when you actually come up with it! But I like the idea that it both says what we do - re-broadcast music - and that the definition of the word is to 'reshape', which is what we're trying to do as a company, by working on new ideas like this.



■ **Tell us about the playlists!**

Oakley: The biggest challenge in the music space, I think, is still music *discovery*. It's all very well-and-good offering 30+ million tracks to people, but how do you know what to listen to? Radio has always filled that role incredibly well. The vast majority of people may not want to spend hours searching through a CD store (or iTunes, Spotify, Rdio or YouTube) deciding what to play, but they knew that they could turn on a station that they identified with, and get a great mix of music, without any of the effort.

For a long time, radio's greatest advantage was that there was simply no alternative to that, and so listeners were happy to put up with the inconvenience of being stuck listening to tracks they don't like and the interruptions of ads and presenters when they just wanted to listen to music. Now, however, there are more options than cater for that, and the costs and inconvenience of accessing them will only continue to fall.

■ **How does Recast stand out from other music services?**

Oakley: There are plenty of music services out there, but, when it comes to playlisting, every one of them is trying to emulate and 'catch up' with the expertise of radio. Algorithms, however, just can't do that job as well as humans can. Understanding this, Recast is unique in that the playlists that we offer are simply better than other music services, and that you know that before you even click play on them - you already trust your favourite radio station to understand what you might enjoy listening to.

We have about 200 stations available right now on Recast, and including the ones you'd expect from South Africa (5FM, 947, East Coast etc), and even a few lesser-known stations, like Stellenbosch's campus station MFM.

■ **Is this the 'anti-radio', with its lack of ad and DJ interruptions?**

Oakley: No, Recast isn't about being a replacement for radio - radio is, or at least should be, about a combination of relevant content and great music, but it does act as a bridge between radio and music services such as Rdio and Spotify, which listeners are spending more and more time on.

We also act as, essentially, a music focus group for radio stations. As a user is streaming a station on Recast, we're collecting analytics about how they're reacting to tracks on the playlist, which stations can use to measure how listeners actually feel about individual tracks on their playlist, and how that is changing over time.

■ **How do we access the app?**

Oakley: We just launched [Recast for iPhone](#), and there's an Android one on the way soon. You can also use Recast online at [recast.fm](#).

Embedded below is a 1-minute 'Recast for iPhone' demo video:

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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