

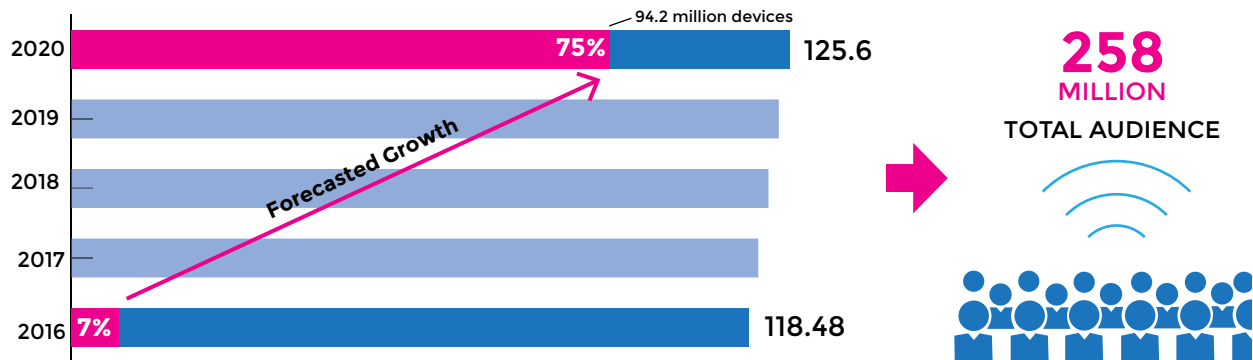
10 Best Practices for Putting Radio on the Amazon Echo

April 2017

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“Alexa, play my favorite radio station!” Consumer adoption of Amazon Echo and its Alexa voice assistant is growing fast. Gartner estimates that 75% of American homes will have a smart speaker like Echo or Google Home by 2020. That will be up from just 7% at the end of 2016 according to Edison Research.

US Household Smart Speaker Ownership 2016 - 2020



Voicebot.ai translated those figures into 94 million homes with a total audience reach of 258 million listeners in 2020 up from around 7.5 million homes and an audience reach of 18 million consumers at the end of 2016. It’s a big market that is growing fast. And, radio has an advantage over streaming if broadcasters move swiftly and intentionally.

Don’t Settle for Obscurity. Voice is the New Radio Button.

However, voice interactive radio is different than one-way broadcast. It is easy to put your live simulcast up through a streaming aggregator, but that forever sentences you to obscurity. Your station is just another commodity that is hard for listeners to find among 100,000 other non-descript stations.

The competition of similar station brands and an infinite dial of endless station choices from all over the world makes it hard for listeners to find their favorite station. There was a time when favorite stations were easy to find, because listeners assigned them to a radio button in the car and in the home. Developing a custom Alexa skill is like having a radio button for the Amazon Echo. A listener only needs to ask Alexa to play your station and it will start playing and can offer an even richer experience than your broadcast signal.



Listeners Can Become Active Participants for a Richer Experience

What is more natural than coupling audio with voice and then giving listeners a chance to interact with your content? When listeners do find your station, you want them to have a unique experience. The new voice platforms like Amazon Alexa are designed for user interaction. You can enable listeners to choose the content they want to hear at any time, respond to trivia, enter contests and claim promotional offers from the station or advertisers.

When listeners do find your station will they be presented with a unique and engaging experience? Voice-driven devices like Amazon Echo offer the opportunity for radio to add an interactive experience to traditional, lean-back passive listening.

Get Found and Be Used Again and Again

XAPPmedia is the leader in helping broadcasters move to Voice Interactive Radio on Amazon Echo. XAPP is one of only five technology providers or agencies to be recognized for interactive voice expertise by both Amazon for Alexa and Google for Google Assistant. Our team has also been recognized for building the very first custom Alexa skill for radio.

We have also pioneered the discipline of voice user experience. While it is important to get found by listeners, it is also critical to deliver an experience that will facilitate repeat usage. Audio streaming services are already on Amazon Echo, but they don't have any special advantages over radio on voice platforms. In fact, radio has several advantages that shine on Amazon Echo if you design the experience properly.

With this in mind, team XAPP has distilled some of our experience into 10 best practices for putting radio on Amazon Echo and everywhere else you can find Alexa skills, from smart mirrors to 15 million Ford automobiles. These best practices include:

- 1. Claim your brand** - connect directly with listeners
- 2. Show your personality** - delivering a Voice Persona™
- 3. Facilitate content discovery** - the convenience of audio scanning
- 4. Deliver a great user experience** - new and repeat users
- 5. Offer time shifted listening** - add on-demand content to your audio library
- 6. Enable spontaneous Interaction** - the ultimate back channel
- 7. Focus on voice first, but not voice-only** - other tools for engagement
- 8. Know your audience** - use analytics to improve listener experience
- 9. Ensure consistent performance** - monitor skill, log events and improve
- 10. Think beyond Alexa** - be where your listeners spend time

#1 Claim Your Brand – connect directly with listeners

At the beginning of 2017, when a listener asked Alexa to play B100, they were served the live stream of a pop music station on TuneIn and not Federated Media's top rated country station in northern Indiana. Do you remember the early days of the web? Everyone was rushing to claim the domain name that matched their brand. Otherwise your fans couldn't find you. If you don't have a custom Alexa skill then your station sits behind the equivalent of a search algorithm driven by TuneIn or iHeart. The listener may or may not find you and could be steered to a competitor.



The solution is to build a custom Alexa skill that has your brand as the invocation name. That means the listener can ask for your station by name and Amazon's Alexa voice assistant will recognize it and deliver the listener to your skill through the Echo. You need to claim your brand name now so listeners can easily find you and make your station their favorite "voice radio button" as they develop new habits for these devices. And so you can connect directly with listeners instead of abdicating control of the listening experience as well as voice monetization to aggregators.

#2 Show Your Personality – delivering a Voice Persona™

Radio has a distinct advantage over streaming services because the industry understands audio branding and many stations have compelling on-air personalities. Use your audio branding and show hosts to introduce your station when your Alexa skill starts and help users immediately identify you as distinct.

This also creates an opportunity to align your Alexa skill with your on-air presence. For example, Federated Media's B100 Alexa skill customizes the listener welcome message by day-part. Listeners are greeted by the voice of the on-air personality at that time and this is automatically updated throughout the day. You can also record special introductions from popular artists that visit the station or appear in the community. XAPPmedia has pioneered the use of Voice Personas™ to reinforce audio branding on voice assistant platforms such as Amazon Echo. Radio provides rich opportunities to create an intimate and consistent connection with listeners. Use Alexa's voice where appropriate, but integrate your distinct Voice Persona™ to create a more meaningful connection with listeners.

#3 Facilitate Content Discovery – the convenience of audio scanning

Content discovery on radio has historically been a function of the scan button. Before that it was turning the dial up and down the frequency range. In those scenarios, a radio station had one shot at capturing a listener's attention. Today, stations are not limited only to their live broadcasts. Many stations are recording show segments so listeners can access them on-demand whenever it's convenient. Others have introduced podcasts and on-demand music by genre. Broadcasters need to facilitate user discovery of their ever-expanding catalog of audio content.



The question then is how you enable content discovery in a voice and audio-only environment. When listeners first open your Alexa skill, offer them 2-4 options and not more. If you have many options, either create categories or include a “more choices” option. A conversational interface doesn't provide a good user experience if the listener has to wait through a long list of choices. For example, you could offer a listener to, “Listen Live,” “Scan Podcasts,” or “Choose Music.”

To scan podcasts or music genres that you offer in customized stations, you need to use Amazon's AudioPlayer. There are some technical hurdles associated with the AudioPlayer functionality that are different from standard skill functions. However, using this Alexa feature enables you to provide short audio previews of the podcasts, show segments or music. Users can then jump in anytime and start listening. It's a great feature that puts “interactive” into voice interactive radio.

#4 Deliver a Great User Experience – new and repeat users

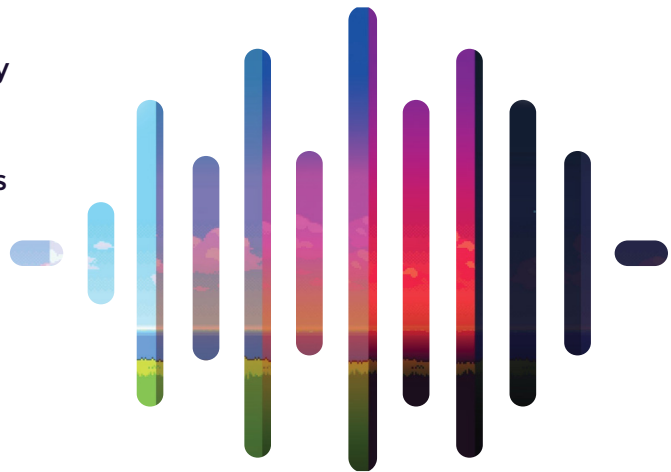
Don't build phone trees! We have all experienced the customer service nightmare of having to wait through an interminably long menu of options only to have our favored option be number seven. When building an Alexa skill you need to consider both the new and repeat users. For new users, you need to introduce them to the skill and the content or interaction options that you offer. The repeat user shouldn't have to wade through all of the choices if she knows what she wants.

This means that new users need to hear the options and be prompted with short phrases they can repeat to select the content they want to access. However, you also need to build your intent model to accommodate variants of requesting the same content with different phrases. This really comes in handy for your repeat users. They might not recall the exact prompted phrase, but the user knows he wants to listen to

a recording of the morning show. He should be able to ask Alexa to open your skill by name and start playing the “morning show” directly without having to go through the menu choices. Accommodating repeat users is an important aspect of delivering a robust voice user experience that keeps your listeners coming back.

#5 Offer Time Shifted Listening – on-demand content from your audio library

We increasingly live in an on-demand world. Part of this is driven by technology creating access to conveniences we couldn't previously imagine. However, it is also driven by high variation in people's schedules. We don't all commute between 8:00 and 9:00 am and few of us leave the office at 5:00 pm. This means we are losing drive-time listeners that would like to hear our morning or afternoon personalities or other featured shows. However, when we were limited to a single linear audio signal, there wasn't much we could do about it.



Many broadcasters are now recording their live shows and making them available to listeners online or through mobile apps to better serve their audience and extract more value from the rich content created. Amazon Echo provides a great platform to accommodate listener schedules and break the linear broadcast constraint. The best Alexa skills for radio provide listeners with multiple listening options and on-demand access is an easy place for many broadcasters to start. Of course, if you have many listening options, you also need to consult Best Practice #3 and ensure you have configured you Alexa skill to enable convenient content discovery through a voice and audio user interface.

#6 Enable Spontaneous Interaction – the ultimate back channel

A key benefit of voice interactive radio is that listeners can become active participants in the radio experience. Enable them to spontaneously interact with your content. This can take a couple of forms. First, make it easy for them to navigate to your other content when the interest strikes them. That comes down to expert user experience design that can effectively interpret user requests and deliver the right content.

The second aspect enables you to become much more creative and break down the traditional one-way radio communication model. You can enable listeners to record



messages for your show hosts, engage in contests, or other promotions that make radio distinct. However, listeners won't have to pick up the phone or go online to participate. They can simply speak and engage in the moment, hands free and eyes free, because voice interactive radio creates the ultimate back channel for engaging listeners.

#7 Focus on Voice First but Not Voice-Only – other tools for engagement

Most of your focus will be building a great voice and audio experience for your listeners. That is appropriate. It is a voice-first technology. However, there are other ways to interact with listeners accessing your station through Amazon Echo.

All Amazon Echo users have installed a companion Alexa app on a mobile device. This app is used to configure the Echo setup but also can be used to deliver visual reminders or other content in the form of cards. These cards represent another way to engage your listeners. Similarly, there are other opportunities for account linking that will enable you to send emails to listeners or engage with social media. When you think about the long-term opportunity represented by an Alexa skill for Amazon Echo you should think voice-first, but not voice only.

#8 Know Your Audience – use analytics to improve listener experience

Unlike the radio signal which offers no feedback, you can actually view aggregate information on how listeners are using your skill. At a basic level, it will offer insight into the popularity of different content that can inform your audience development efforts. It can also reveal listeners by time of day, average session duration, number of interactions by the listener and much more. Finally, your listener usage patterns can provide insight into advertising and other monetization opportunities.

Radio has historically relied on third parties such as Nielsen to learn about audience behaviors. With Amazon Alexa, you don't receive estimates of audience, you have actual data showing precisely how many listeners were active at any time and what content they were consuming. Audience intelligence is available and you should be reviewing it at least monthly.

#9 Ensure Consistent Performance – monitor, log and improve

Launching an Alexa skill shouldn't be viewed as a single event. You should be thinking about maintaining and optimizing skill performance over time. You can also use analytics and logging to improve skill usability and identify interactions where Alexa may be failing and in need of attention. The data may also suggest that you introduce new navigation options that get listeners to your best content more quickly.

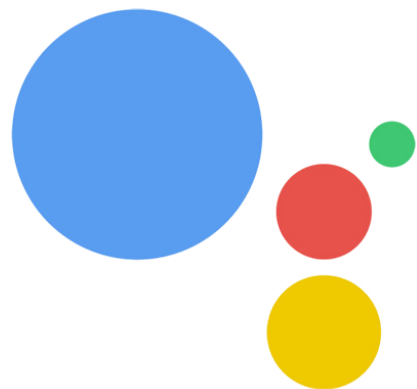


This is where many stations and technology vendors that are new to voice interactive radio will make a substantial mistake. Getting to launch is only part of the program. Just like you need to maintain broadcast equipment and constantly consider programming updates, you need to monitor and maintain your skill over time. XAPP has specific expertise in this area and has built tools to facilitate robust monitoring and logging so skills can be maintained efficiently and improved over time.

#10 Think Beyond Alexa - be where your listeners spend time

Amazon Echo holds about 90% market share today for smart speakers with voice assistants. However, that is going to change. Google launched Google Home last fall and is gaining ground quickly. Microsoft's Cortana will be on a new Harman Kardon Invoke device and available during the workday on over 80% of computers used in businesses. These represent other avenues to reach consumers that will become important over time. The iPhone was first and then was overtaken by Android. Similarly, Amazon Echo was first and other products will gain ground even if they don't surpass Amazon's early lead.

The Amazon Alexa logo, consisting of the word "amazon" in black with a curved arrow underneath, and the word "alexa" in blue.



The Cortana logo, featuring a blue circular icon with a white ring inside, followed by the word "Cortana" in blue.

Since broadcasters will want to be where listeners are spending their time, you should take a long view on how voice interactive radio will become a multi-platform phenomenon. That means managing your content for multi-platform delivery and understanding the different models that each voice assistant vendor employs. You don't want to recreate the wheel each time you want to launch on a new platform. XAPP is a leading developer on each of the major platforms today and can help you better understand the implications of taking a multi-platform approach.

Welcome to the Voice Interactive Radio Era

This is an exciting time for radio. After some tumultuous years that included new competition from streaming services, radio is facing a completely new audio content distribution opportunity that can expand both total listeners and time spent listening. Amazon Echo is rapidly building a big audience for the Alexa voice service. This audience is predominantly in the home today, but later this year will include 15 million Ford vehicles and millions more from other auto manufacturers. This is about bringing radio back into the home and re-establishing radio's prominence in the car. This is not an audience of millions. It will quickly represent an audience of hundreds of millions in the U.S. alone. Alexa has a prominent role to play in bringing radio into the voice interactive era.



The opportunity goes beyond the Echo and cars to other devices that will embed Alexa, Google Assistant, Microsoft Cortana, Hound or other platforms. Access to audio entertainment is becoming ubiquitous through voice assistants and radio has an enormous opportunity to play a central role in consumer engagement. Building an Alexa skill is only the first step in this new era of voice interactive radio. However, our admonition is to recognize that the voice platforms are different than traditional radio, the web and mobile. As a result, it requires a different approach and different abilities to ensure success. We hope the 10 Best Practices for Putting Radio on the Amazon Echo helps you get started on the right foot.

More Resources to Learn About Voice Interactive Radio

If you need a partner along the way, you can be assured XAPP has the most expertise building for voice assistant technologies, has the strongest relationships with the platform product teams and has the most experience helping radio stations make the leap to voice interaction radio. Our expertise ranges from user experience and application design all the way through monitoring, analytics and management and even monetization. Click the button below if you would like to discuss taking your station to Amazon Echo. Also, we have assembled a few resources to help you learn more.

[GET MY STATION ON AMAZON ECHO](#)

Other Resources

- » [View Voice Interactive Radio Video Demo](#)
- » [Learn More About Amazon Echo and Radio](#)
- » [Learn More About Amazon Alexa Voice Assistant](#)



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About XAPPmedia

XAPPmedia™ is the leader in delivering interactive voice experiences for brands and media and is the first company to Give Brands a Voice™ enabling instant, voice-activated connections with consumers through mobile audio apps and voice assistants. XAPP's tools can be applied to mobile content delivery, mobile advertising, voice recognition and voice experience development and maintenance. XAPPmedia was founded in 2012 and is headquartered in Washington, DC.