

## **Radio Paradise: after 13 years still going strong**

**It is one of the most successful and talked about webradio stations: Radio Paradise from the little town of Paradise in California. Already in 2004 the American Time Magazine called the station 'The revolution in radio' and Radio Paradise is still 'commercial free, listener supported'.**

But at the same time it's a family business, operated by music compiler and DJ Bill Goldsmith and his wife Rebecca. How solid is that model? Does commercial-free radio still work, what's the example for other internet stations and what to do when they retire? International Report asked Bill and Rebecca.

Radio Paradise's founder Bill Goldsmith repeated the idea behind his station clearly two years ago, when he was a guest host at KHUM, a station in Humboldt county that has more or less the same programming philosophy (they call it 'radio without the rules'). Interviewed by Mike Dronkers, Goldsmith emphasised that it's not a new idea, just an old idea that has been almost forgotten.

"Radio Paradise is the old 1960s progressive-FM philosophy (put a DJ in a room full of records & turn him/her loose) applied to the whole universe of 21st century music," says Goldsmith: "modern & classic rock, world music, electronica, acoustic, even a smattering of jazz and classical - with a real human DJ in full control, not just an 'iPod on random play' jumble of styles. It's radio-as-art, rather than radio-as-marketing - something you just don't hear on FM any more."

Bill Goldsmith has always been a pioneer, not only in radio itself, but also in the combination radio and internet: audio streaming, website with listener reviews and a forum with more than 135.000 registered members, integrating social media, HD slideshows to go with the music etc. He started out as a DJ straight out of high school in 1971. In the seventies he worked for stations in California and Hawaii.

In the 1980's, "radio became a hit-spewing money machine, intent on cramming as much advertising down as many throats as it possibly could," Goldsmith said to Planet Geek! in a 2004 interview. "The 1990's were even worse (...) and sent the last remaining creative spirits in radio running for the hills, the bottle, or a new career in timeshare sales."

Bill found refuge as a DJ on so called freeform radio stations like KLRB, WCAS, KFAT and KPIG. He was responsible for programming stations and once had to do so for six months without commercials. He was appalled by how it sounded -no interruptions and a continuous flow of music. So when he decided, after thirty years, to exchange terrestrial radio for online radio, he had a clear wish: no commercials on the station. He did not choose a pay-radio model either, like some satellite services did and newly founded music services like Spotify.

Already in 1995 he had the first full-time webcast: a 16kbps MP3 stream for a maximum of 50 listeners. Compare that to the best streams Radio Paradise is offering today: 192kbps MP3 and 128kbps AAC, which makes it one of the best sounding webradio stations in the world. As Bill told Planet Geek! more than eight years ago: "I was thoroughly and completely hooked on the idea of internet radio. I saw it then -as I see it now- as the natural successor to FM, with a worldwide reach and an unlimited number of channels."

In 1999 Bill married Rebecca, moved to Paradise, California and in February 2000 started his "dream project that had been bubbling around in my head for decades": Radio Paradise came online with Bill serving as DJ and music compiler, and Rebecca serving as music reviewer guru and business manager. Thirteen years later, Radio Paradise continues to be operated exclusively by this synergistic dynamic duo.

And the concept worked. In 2004, less than four years after the start of Radio Paradise, Time Magazine reported that contributions by listeners (in those days fewer than 5000 during peak times) totalled 120.000 dollar a year. That was enough to pay for the cost of stream servers, bandwidth, royalty fees to music copyright holders, income & business taxes and all other expenses. Apart from that it was enough for a "comfortable lifestyle" as Goldsmith stated back then. But it's more than eight years later now, so International Report wondered how things are going in Paradise right now.

**International Report:** Is the business model 'commercial free, listener supported' still a viable choice for internet radio stations or is Radio Paradise just a wonderful exception?

**Bill Goldsmith:** "Our business model works very well for us, and I know of a few other stations who've made it work as well. But most who've tried it have failed. It seems to work best with an audience like RP's that's looking for something that can't easily be provided by mainstream radio stations. For a more pop- or hit-oriented format -or one serving a narrow stylistic niche- it doesn't seem to work as well."

**IR:** Are the contributions from listeners these days still enough to pay expenses and make a decent living?

**BG:** "We still are able to make a living from Radio Paradise, and devote ourselves to the station full-time."

**IR:** What has been the biggest change content-wise since Radio Paradise began?

**BG:** "The changes at RP since 2000 have taken the form of a gradual evolution rather than any kind of dramatic change, so it's hard to really single anything out."

**IR:** What has been the biggest technological change since Radio Paradise began?

**BG:** "That would have to be the advent of mobile listening, along with the dramatic increase in the bandwidth available to the average Internet user, both fixed and mobile. Users of 3G cell networks today have a faster connection than even "broadband" users in 2000, and the speeds available on modern 4G networks or cable connections are in the same league as -- if not better than -- what was available to us at server farms back in 2000."

**IR:** What is your opinion of internet radio nowadays? Did the web fulfil its promise to revolutionise the radio or did old-fashioned commerce just caught up with it, doing the same as previously on FM?

**BG:** "I think that the impact of the Internet on radio programming is just beginning to be felt. What's available now is a mix of the revolutionary and the truly mundane. Most likely that's what will be available for quite some time to come."

**IR:** Have you heard about the offshore radio stations in Europe in the sixties, seventies and eighties? Most notably, have you heard of Radio Caroline and did you ever listen to it?

**BG:** "Yes! I had the chance to hear Radio Caroline during a visit to the UK in the late 1960s. It sounded very much like an American station of the same time period, but with different accents :-). That and Radio Luxembourg (which did similar programming in

English in the evenings) were what everybody seemed to listen to. The BBC hadn't quite caught up with things at the time."

**IR:** How can people in the Netherlands support Radio Paradise, given the fact that, for example, sweaters and other hardware double in price because of custom duties? Is online shopping via Radio Paradise a better way?

**BG:** "The most effective way to send support to us is directly - via Paypal or with a Visa or Mastercard. We do get a small percentage on online sales via the links on our website as well."

**IR:** What are we going to do when Bill and Rebecca retire? In other words: how do you see the future of Radio Paradise?

**BG:** "We're still discussing what our exit strategy might be. Stay tuned..."

[www.radioparadise.com](http://www.radioparadise.com)

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