

Internet Radio MSN Radio By Don Lewis

This is the fourth article in my review of Internet radio services. If you missed previous articles, they are available in the Product Review section of our website at <http://ppcuginc.com/prodrev.htm>.

MSN Radio requires the Windows Media Player which is included with Windows XP, so using it is fairly simple. However, be sure you have the latest updates. Version 10 is the latest, but there have been many security updates. Check for updates at www.update.microsoft.com. Version 11 is available in beta, but I have not installed it.

The Windows Media Player provides the functions of organizing your library of music, ripping tracks from CDs to either WMA or MP3 files, burning CDs with music from your music library, access to the MSN music and video store and access to MSN Radio.



MSN Radio has an impressive list of stations. However, many are reserved for Radio Plus subscribers. The free service sound quality is limited to 20k bits per second. It provides acceptable sound when played through my stereo. There are no commercials on the MSN programmed stations. Some of the stations are Internet stations accessed through websites such as the kaha.com comedy station. These may include commercials and popups.

MSN Radio Plus provides access to 25 more stations. The sound quality is upgraded to "near CD quality". It automatically adjusts the bit stream to the maximum that your connection will take.

It supports over 3000 fan favorite stations. These are playlists made up of music recommended by other fans of your favorite artists. I searched for all of the artists I could think of and got hits on all of them.

Another feature is called MSN Local Sounds. You choose a state and city and MSN provides a list of local stations in the area. Choose your favorite and it matches the type of music played by that station. There are over 1400 of these stations.

I was disappointed in the list of Jazz stations and I found no Blues stations except two Russian Jazz and Blues stations. The music was pretty good, but the website was in Russian. There were both Jazz and Blues artists in the fan favorite stations.

None of the stations offered the ability to choose music and build a playlist.

A Microsoft Passport is required to subscribe to MSN Radio Plus. The cost is \$29.99 per year (\$2.50 per month) or \$4.99 by the month. They have a very generous month free trial. Most other services only offer a one week trial.