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Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

February 24, 1999

Chairman William Kennard
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Kennard:

I am a professor and researcher in collaborative technologies, and I have a proposal to support your current Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on "microradio" stations.

Microradio stations have an important role in supporting communication and awareness in a community. My students and I use a very low power FM transmitter here in the College of Computing at Georgia Tech to broadcast music and announcements through the building (as far as a Section 15 compliant FM transmitter will take us). The challenge for the station, however, is creating enough interesting content to get community members to listen. A radio station with few or irregular listeners cannot adequately serve to inform community members of new events nor to alert them to emergency information.

We address this problem with our radio station by inviting the community to define content for the station. We have invented a web-based collaboration tool on which users can upload music files (MIDI) or recorded announcements (in WAV or AIFF file formats), and edit a "playlist" to schedule their contributions on the air. A computer plays each of the files from the playlist, and the output of the computer is input to the FM transmitter.

The strength of this approach is that it keeps listeners involved by ensuring that the station is constantly playing content of interest to the community. The content is engaging to the members of the community because they are the ones who select and schedule it. Because it is a computer doing the broadcast, the station is constantly on the air, without an engineer or DJ.

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We face several problems with our approach. Our current transmitter is too weak to cover even the entire building. Without a wide enough base of listeners, we draw on few contributors and can have little impact. Further, a single playlist isn't enough to guarantee listener interest — the diversity of musical tastes in the College calls for scheduled programs with separate playlists, with regularly scheduled breaks for announcements.

Our work makes us naturally quite interested in the proposed changes to the licensing rules. We would like to improve our own radio station through use of the new microradio class. We would also like to make our collaboration and broadcast software available to other community groups to support their own microradio broadcasts. While commercial software is certainly available to broadcast recorded messages, our software is particularly appropriate for community groups where collaborative composition is valuable and where cost is an issue.

We propose serving as a test station for the new microradio class of stations. We request FCC assistance in defining a set of equipment appropriate to serve as a testbed, purchasing the equipment, and setting up the station with appropriate licensing. For our part, we propose completing our software, testing and evaluating the station in our campus community, and making our software available freely via the Internet. In this way, we hope to support the microradio vision for community groups.

I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,



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