

## Tuning in to radio nirvana

September 25, 2008

Page 1 of 2 | [Single page](#)

**Rod Easdown listens in on Tajikistan's airwaves with a dedicated and stylish internet radio.**

In 2002, an American company called Tivoli Audio made radios sexy again. Until then, radios were almost all cheap and nasty but Tivoli's Model One not only looked great, it sounded great, too. And it was blissfully easy to operate, with a very few, wonderfully tactile controls.

In short, it was like no other radio on the market and almost overnight it became one of the biggest selling items in specialist hi-fi stores. The Model One proved there was a market for quality mantle radios, a proposition the major electronics companies refused to gamble on, and it spawned a rush of me-too products.

No one could accuse Tivoli of sitting on its hands since then. It now has a wide range of portables, clock radios and iPod docks. But its latest offering is just about radio nirvana.

Have you heard of internet radio? Radio stations all around the world make their content available on the internet and the usual way to access it is through a computer with a broadband connection. You simply choose the radio station you want, be it in Tasmania or Tajikistan, and listen in while you're doing whatever it is you do on your computer.

That's the trouble - you have to be at the computer. Or it was the trouble until Tivoli's new NetWorks radio came along. Take this out of the box and turn it on and it immediately pairs with your wi-fi network. Alternatively it can be linked to your broadband connection through an ethernet connection. This means it not only operates happily when your computer is turned off, but it can operate in any room of the house.

The radio is factory-loaded with five stations and you can add to these quickly and simply by calling up stations anywhere either by name, location or genre. Find one you like and you can store it in your list of favourites.

Five stations can be set as presets but the number of favourites you can add is unlimited.

Of course the station you're listening to will be in the time zone of wherever it's coming from and in that language, too, but this can have its advantages. When there's nothing on local radio but drive-time traffic reports and ads, you can listen to a late-night blues station in New York where the only ads are brief and far apart. It also means that homesick Australians overseas can listen to Triple J and Victorians in Queensland can still catch Neil Mitchell in the morning, daylight saving notwithstanding.

And there's the delight of exploring, from the seriously strange gospel broadcasters in the southern United States to the station in Austria that only plays polkas. If you're into classical music, you can't beat Italy.



The Tivoli NetWorks.

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Page 2 of 2

This radio gets better when you turn your computer on. Activate media sharing on the computer and the radio can find and play the music you've stored on your hard drive, and again it does so in any room in the house. You can call up music by artist, title or playlist through the radio itself, and if you buy a second unit, both can be used at once in separate rooms, playing different music at different volume levels. The Tivoli handles WMA, MP3 and Real Audio files. The sound quality is first-class and it has good buffering, storing the signal ahead to minimise the drop-outs that happen in this medium. And it retains the elegant, classical look of a Tivoli. Less is definitely more here. A credit-card remote controls it all, or there's a set of fixed controls on the rear of the radio along with a USB connection and a headphone jack.

It can also be used as a clock radio, with a built-in time display and two alarms, a sleep timer and a snooze function.

The Tivoli's main limitation is that it only handles FM stations, which may be a music quality thing but is more likely an interference thing.

There are other and cheaper internet radios around and some can also access the music on your computer, but the Tivoli is the best-looking internet radio we've seen and certainly the best sounding outside specialist equipment.

There are three models. The base unit, which is an internet radio only, is \$699, while a model with a built-in conventional FM tuner for accessing local FM stations is \$799. The \$899 range-topper has an in-built tuner for digital audio broadcasting, due to start up next January. A second speaker unit is available for stereo music, as is a subwoofer and a CD player.

It's available in three finishes: cherry, walnut or wenge, a rich, dark brown finish that's popular in consumer electronics and furnishings.

You'll find the NetWorks radio in specialist hi-fi outlets and some department stores.

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