

Some said it couldn't be done.
But a team of volunteers with a DIY ethic
created an internet radio station

Out of thin air: Utah Free Media (UtahFM.org)

by Katherine Pioli

“People from every aspect of the working world volunteer at Utah Free Media,” says Rachael Bradford, programmer of the Saturday afternoon show “Completely Random.” Pushing her blonde hair back from her face, she turns to her computer to type in the next three songs on her playlist. “Most of us are not trained for radio,” she continues while typing, “and honestly, that’s where the fun comes in. When you get people who aren’t bred for this—when they haven’t been groomed—the styles, backgrounds, musical tastes, everything... is so eclectic.”

The station broadcasts from the basement of a downtown building near the Gateway. At the end of a hall, beyond the exposed grey

concrete walls that soak up the winter chill, a small, comfortable room is filled with microphones, music players, computers and a radio console. This room is the realization of a vision started last February when changes in local radio programming produced a collective cry for a new voice in community radio.

Mike Place, current board chair for Utah Free Media, was one of the

first to respond to the pleas. With countless hours and a few dollars, Mike and many other volunteers built Utah Free Media by hand, piece by piece. Mike recalls with pain and pride the hours spent accumulating the necessary pieces. “It took me two solid weeks of

Left: Calvin Mumm (host of Calvin’s Clubhouse)

Below: Susan Schlotterbeck (PSA director), Andy Schlotterbeck (host of Another Age), Mike Place

photos by Troy Mumm

working till midnight or later to make 250 feet of cables for the entire studio,” says Mike. With plenty of help from people both experienced in radio and new to the medium, Utah Free Media was born.

From the beginning, the response to calls for donations in money and equipment surprised Mike Place. Pete Ashdown of XMission offered support. A radio station in Oregon donated a console. Babs deLay offered studio space.

“That’s what I love about community radio,” he says. “That commitment is what makes it great.” The new grassroots station made its debut broadcast online just six weeks after work began.

“We still have people coming in off the street wanting to volunteer. Our new volunteer meetings are always packed and lots of ideas for growth in programming are still being generated,” reports Mike, who hosts his own show on Monday afternoons.

In addition to music, podcasts such as Pinpoint SLC have been a

source of particular interest. Produced by another station founder, Patrick Commiskey, Pinpoint explores the arts and culture scenes in the city by spotlighting community members.

Utah Free Media’s independence from corporate monies allows programmers to play the music they find the most interesting without the stress of striving for consistently high listener numbers. Not trying to cater to everyone’s musical tastes all of the time allows shows such as Rachael’s “Completely Random” to exist.

“I hear a band I like and research it, maybe find a tangential band that I also like,” says Rachel. “That’s the beauty of it—all the programmers have the freedom to play what they want whether it’s really obscure or commercial.”

Tune in and you’ll hear what I mean. Utah Free Media has some of the most creative playlists around, and you have to wonder where they find some of this stuff. Utah FM flouts this independence, counting on listeners to appreciate that very quality and respond by spreading the word, volunteering and donating.

Internet radio is able to survive on much less cash than the most frugal of FM station budgets. “But all of the money we receive is essential to our existence,” Mike reminds us. “It all goes into the operating budget.” He says in these next few months community support will be particularly important.

If you have not yet set your browser to WWW.UTAHFM.ORG, do it now. If you like what you hear, support the station by attending their first fundraising event this month (see below). In addition to a good show, you can meet other supporters and applaud the volunteers who committed to their vision and pulled what may well grow into a great music station out of thin air. ♦

UTAHFM.ORG presents Carrie Rodriguez

When: Sunday, January 18

Where: Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center (Black Box)

Admission: \$35 (VIP pass, \$75, includes food, drinks and an opportunity to meet Ms. Rodriguez.) 21+ only; “adult” beverages available

Info/ticket sales: WWW.ARTTIX.ORG or WWW.UTAHFM.ORG

Ever wanted to get involved in radio? Look no further than Utah FM. Your community radio station is looking for more volunteers to produce podcasts with training and equipment provided by the station. They have spots available for new radio shows and need radio producers to fill these slots. They are also looking for an experienced radio producer to work on developing a new podcast program—ideally a person with a minimum of two years media experience who is willing to donate their time and services. The application is available on the station’s website.



Rachael Bradford (host, Completely Random)

photo by Katherine Pioli