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The Best Internet Radio Stations

It's intimidating trying to find the best internet radio stations, right? Whether you're bored at work or simply a couch potato at home, there is now the mysterious world of internet radio meets social networking. Yup, you've heard about all this nonsense with "friend recommendations" and "streaming playlists", yea? Have you seen the plethora of free internet radio options when taking on this arduous task? Jango.com, Finetune, Meemix, Slacker, Imeem, Deezer, MOG, Last.fm, Pandora, Haystack etc. Naturally, these are all internet avenues to finding brand new music or just kicking back to enjoy non-terrestrial or satellite (Sirius, XM) radio. But which one should you use? Well, that's difficult to answer as each one tries to update it's sticky features almost on a weekly basis. Pandora and Last.fm are considered jango2.JPG the dinosaurs of this social realm. The more recent entries such as Jango, Meemix (Israel based), and Deezer (French based) are vying for distinct market share in what's now becoming a crowded internet category. Above all else, the controversy of traditional royalty payments to recording artists by these social startups has come head to head. Anyhow, here's the breakdown of internet radio and social networking: Pandora.com internet radio is easy enough in that it just streams music and you click "yes I like", "no I don't like" - from this it formulates a channel to your deepest satisfaction. The older demographic (25-50) would favor this portal because these folks have little time to instant message, add songs, trade information, and network with their "friends" group. There is no social network option with Pandora. Last.fm is the Viacom owned behemoth based in London. It has a large fanbase sharing similar interests in destinations like Myspace and Facebook. This site is definitely all about the social networking! Since they held the spotlight for the past couple of years, the major record labels and music publishers want them to pay royalties..and pay BIG! Jango.com is brand new to the internet radio scene and I can tell you I met with the founders recently in their Soho, NY offices. They have a polished Web 2.0 presentation, high quality streaming, and a good work ethic. Again, this portal is for the youth oriented user as you can click on other members' similar songs/playlists in real time. Each time you select or search music/artists, alternative song choices/soundalikes/same taste friends appear all over your screen! Eventually you'll tailor an internet radio station or stations to your exact liking with only the same old songs you've always loved. Isn't that just ironic? But Jango looks like a promising company with large aspirations. Imeem.com just harnessed the rights to broadcast all Sony-BMG music artists. In return, the major music conglomerate gets a cut of ad monies placed in the Imeem radio players that stream your music. Once again, they put emphasis on sharing tastes and social networking. Meemix.com is another brand new entrant and has yet to really get beyond Alpha phase. They're behind in the pack at this point. Finetune.com features major label artist bookmarks (Coldplay) on its homepage if that's any consolation? Like some of the others, this company made it a point to create embed players for Myspace and Facebook. In small part, they also insist on administering some playlists themselves from data compiled by...whatever method they choose I guess. Algorithms are a funny thing. Who knows how they really work? MOG.com has instituted not only internet radio streaming but now MOG TV. Now you can watch 400,000 more music videos online with playlists dissected by users galore. Is that good or bad? They have that Rhapsody.com thing going too headed by editorial chief Michael Goldberg. This Bay Area 2.0 is a bit useless and cluttered but who can blame them for trying. Haystack.com prides itself on having an indie like mentality. This means they want to reach out to hipsters, trendsetters and early adopters of new music/internet radio. At least this is what the casual visitor will take away from it. In that respect, it comes off as being exclusive which is definitely not a positive aspect. They also have a "Tastemakers" section which doesn't amount to much. The user may become confused as to why they should return to Haystack despite the typical social networking setup. Haystack may be a little thin on content and features at the end of the day. Slacker.com fits better with the Pandoras of the world as it lacks the social feature. But you don't have much say in the channels so it's a more passive experience like Yahoo Music radio. For that matter just choose your local KEXP, KCRW or WDST for streaming. Deezer.com, the French company, used to be called Blogmusik. They ran into music licensing trouble, got reprimanded and now operate legally under the Deezer moniker. More or less they relaunched their internet radio initiatives with good intent. I notice that the buffering delays test the user's patience. The other sites do not have this issue. Once again, users can share music lists and the like. There's no sign-up necessary to browse through stations/songs and get a basic overview of the free content.