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The Public Radio App Saga [Tim Eby](https://email.mg2.substack.com/c/eJxVkEluxCAQRU_T7NpidMOCRTa5BmIou0lssACn5Zw-OM4mUqn0VYO-_vO2wZzLobdcGzqbaccGOsGrLtAaFLRXKCYGzfGDc0Eo6jIQKSSK1UwFYLVx0a3sgLbdLdHbFnM6PxjDEmP01HYamaTWAyVkJHx0wHDwwCl0Hay6jO0eIiQPGr6gHDkBWvSzta3e2NuNvvdqcf0Adwx1d7VZ_zn4vPbxBnlboAtKKVOjGu_98N4PUdQUU4IftBtzIdRABrCBPUAoPwklgiVTsA5jJoN3loFVN47Xmf6zQEXHusb27LuXg-8hl_nMavpu3VNsh4Fk3QLhwtAumr9gzAwJSqccjG2ajHRUgrOOQ-Ar9clJKimVYKibhty_kv5L-gNGGorC)

#### **Pocket Casts and the Public Radio App Saga**

The news last week of the sale of Pocket Casts by NPR, New York Public Radio, Chicago Public Media, and BBC Studios Americas to [Automattic](https://email.mg2.substack.com/c/eJwlkE1uxCAMhU8zLCN-AyxYdNNrRAQ8GdoEInA6Sk9f0kiWZfnJfvpe8AhLqafbS0NytQnPHVyGd1sBESo5GtQpRSepllIxTvoYmVGGpDY9K8Dm0-qwHkD2Y15T8JhKvi6EoIZS8nJW6qDDGAyVcRTM6ABWGabFKAPnVt_G_ogJcgAHP1DPkoGs7oW4t4f4ePDPXv7AsnnEFIZQtr4gyXHKGdWcMyaVsgMbwEehQdnwVFZFz57Rz5QKE8PsBXj7kHRb-NCOuaEP39cnUl1qW8JX194z_A6lLhfM1LXtyAnPCbKfV4g3J95x_ZNPC2SoPcY4eXRs5KNVUozCKHpjXUEYa4xVgnTT2AlSdpi2L5jPPwqhf6g), the parent company of Tumblr and WordPress.com, signals the end of a three-year experiment to operate a podcast distribution platform owned by public media entities. The app was initially acquired to “*[further] public radio’s leading role as an innovator in audio discovery and distribution while ensuring the continued support and growth of one of the most popular listening platforms on the market.”*

This news comes on the heels earlier this year of the [sale of RadioPublic](https://email.mg2.substack.com/c/eJwlkcuOpDAMRb-msgPlQaiwyKI38xvISQyVbkiYPKrEfP2ERrIsW1dXvjq2UHCN6dRHzIVcbS7ngTrgJ29YCiZSM6bZOz3Q5zBIxkkbHVNSEZ_nJSHu4DddUkVyVLN5C8XHcDmEoIpS8tKLgUWMFuUgkTtrgYNFq3BkjlEr7X0YqvMYLGp8YzpjQLLpVylHfoivB__TKoEPV7Lexr2tYCGXDuzf6hPmLoHz8Y7QQXeATz6sXVy6N2y16RBc1_zx_Ruw-YnXnHJGn5wzNkg59axHcOKJcrKLnKQDtjgwlArlrAGBMD0Guq-8z9XkAvbnSkKS9nn35dW0j8F_fUzrhWJu2l6DL-eMAcyG7qZUbti_3OYVA6b2BDdD0Wzk4yQHMQol6Q3lwqgmpSYpSDvqYnMFXfz-jeb8D7lJmQ0), the app spun out of PRX in 2016. Described in its roll-out as a product designed *to reimagine audio for mobile devices*, RadioPublic was sold to Acast, the international podcast hosting platform and advertising marketplace, back in February.

The Pocket Casts sale was finalized after [Current broke the news](https://email.mg2.substack.com/c/eJwlkU1uhDAMhU8z2YHyQyAssuim10Am8TBpIUGJ6YievqFIkWPLst_TZweES8qn3VMhdoWJzh1txHdZkQgzOwrmKXjb8aHrtJCspl4YbVgo0zMjbhBWS_lAth_zGhxQSPGaUIobztnLOi9HNw8aYOiN6J0HJaSROPuuk07BLQyHDxgdWvzBfKaIbLUvor081MdDftbnjpwxUpvyUivJpagfv8Kt3GzoAzTpHTGXBpZqrqHUFFzXZk_uG6lxUKjUwl9Js69Az5S3uoEFey3kg5RCdFqPrWgRvBpQj-6pR-1BPD3MnCvj3QwKYXx0fFtkW465ELjv1qWNZRvKFuhVe-8Zfy-vF5ep9rYjBjonjDCv6G9kdJP_hzgtWI3Xi_gJyIpe9qPuVK-M5jehi6kZjRm1YlXUpzoVLYXtC-fzD5sHmt4) in January that it was on the block after a review of NPR’s latest financial statement that revealed that the owners “met and agreed to sell Pocket Casts, the sole asset of Podcast Media” in December.

Tyler Falk from Current reported that NPR’s share in the net loss of Pocket Casts in its 2020 fiscal year was more than $800,000. According to the report, NPR (and NYPR) had a 34.6% share of ownership of the app company known as Podcast Media LLC.

The saga of these two apps, along with the lack of audience growth for the NPR One, are somewhat worrisome developments at a time when the competitive environment in on-demand audio is growing more intense, as is our dependence on third-party distribution platforms.

**The beauty of owning a platform is that you own the usage data to deepen the relationship with your audience and better serve them**. Unfortunately, we’ve just not been able to muster the collective strength as an industry to embrace a single product across the system to effectively co-brand with local stations in a way that PBS has been able to achieve with its app and with PBS Passport.

And that brings me to another observation about public radio’s mobile apps. I love listening to different stations across the country, and downloading a station app is a great way to see how well the station’s brand is reflected in the product that lives on your phone. [Public Media Apps](https://email.mg2.substack.com/c/eJwlkM2OrSAQhJ_msLuGH1FYsJjNvIZpoPUwV8EAjnGefnBMOp1OKtWV-hxUXFK-zJ5KJfea6rWjiXiWFWvFTI6CeQre9HTse8k4aadnSioSyjRnxA3Camo-kOyHXYODGlK8HUJQRSl5m9HTmQ6Kc0uHAbx1VM_Qu1kBp9TP4gmGwweMDg1-Y75SRLKad617eYmPF_9sc55n92Rs6APAvpfOpa0p6cj_3NrstZBgOOWMjpwz1kupO9YheDGi1G6WWnpgswdLqVDeWRAI-tXTbeFdOWyp4P7fT0k2oWyhvpt2WvzpUl7uglPTtiOGek0Ywa7on-71QfhHY1owYm5o_QTVsIEPWvZiEErSp-oNR2mltBSkhfrUXNHUsH2hvX4Bqq6Iyw) has a sizeable share of the market for stations, and it’s a reasonable solution¹ for many, particularly for joint licensees along with stations in smaller or medium markets. **But I do find that many stations seem to “get it and forget it” as its interface and features have basically remained unchanged for years.**

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A sample of different apps from public radio stations

Last week [Elizabeth Hussey wrote a piece on the JacApps blog](https://email.mg2.substack.com/c/eJwtkEluhDAQRU_T3oE80mbhRTa5BvJQNE7ARnbRLXL6mHSkUqkG__ry8xbhkctp9lyRXGnCcweT4FVXQIRCjgplisFIepdSMU5aGZhWmsQ6zQVgs3E1WA4g--HW6C3GnC6FEFRTShYzgPVSMyHnIaiRzkELpzhYPgcFTtK3sT1ChOTBwBPKmROQ1SyIe72Jjxv_bPFlvd332vu8tW7LLq7QXZNuya8Oc2efOYYOF6jQDV17tuXUbbGi_YbaJCQaTjmjd84Zk0qNPevBBnEHNfpZjSpYNgfrKBU6eGcF2PEm6fbgfT1cO-O_L3NSTKxbxKXtXg5--lwe1-eny_FIEc8JknUrhDcXfOP9IzU9IEFp2MNk0bCBD6OSYhBa_WO4wOlR61EJ0kxDbqpkMG5f4M5fPl2SMQ) discussing “Six Common Mistakes Companies Make with Mobile Apps,” and it’s worth checking to see how your station app stacks up.

* **Not Aligning Your Mobile App With Your Strategy**. Hussey writes, “*If your app isn’t aligned with your overall strategy, you will almost certainly fail. What you’re doing inside your business, on your website, and in your app should all support your overall goal and strategy in the same way*.”
* **Too Much Stuff**. If you check the analytics of your app usage, you’ll probably find that nearly all of the time spent on your app is listening to your streams or perhaps something on-demand. The best station apps focus on the listening experience. Keep it simple.
* **Not Promoting the Mobile App**. This seems to be hit or miss with a lot of stations. Think about all of your channels on- and off-air to reach potential users. In her post, Hussey also [cautions on the overuse use of push messaging](https://email.mg2.substack.com/c/eJwlUMtuxCAM_Jrl1ohnAgcOvexvRAacLC0hESFdpV9f0iAL2xrboxkPFee1nHZb90qub6znhjbje09YKxZy7FjGGKykg5SKcdLKwLTSJO7jVBAXiMnWciDZDpeihxrXfG0IQTWl5GX1AOACCD_RXkymR-xle0obp6jU6iaGI0TMHi3-YDnXjCTZV63b_hCfD_5s4dMFVdg6vy6td2mdWzpyzHuFlD5ga9P8SaLllDM6cM6YVMp0rEMIYkBl_KSMCsCmAI5SoYN3IBDMQ9Jl5t1-uHbKf18MpNi4L7G-GvZ2-NutZb40jg1bGmk9R8zgEoZbfr1d_DdknDFjae6GEaplPe-NkqIXWtFb7eWPNlobJUgjDWvbyrbG5Qvd-QcjzIh_).
* **Poor or Confusing Branding**. For joint licensees, this can sometimes be a problem in how the brands for each service are displayed in the app.
* **Poor Usability**. After the overuse of push messaging, the next reason that a user would uninstall the app is if the streams don’t function well. As Hussey states, “Test, test, test!”
* **Not Having the Right Support**. This can be a big dilemma for many home-grown apps from a smaller shops.

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