

ChatGPT comes for radio

This is Hot Pod, The Verge's newsletter about podcasting and the audio industry. [Sign up here for more.](#)

It's been pretty slow in the audio world for the past few weeks – except when it comes to AI, which seems to be progressing at a clip.

Today, ChatGPT comes to radio, NPR employees prepare for layoffs, and Spotify expands its audiobook business.

Widespread layoffs expected this week at NPR

Last month, NPR CEO John Lansing announced that the network would lay off 10 percent of its workforce to cover an expected \$30 million budget shortfall this year. This is the week final decisions are expected to come down, and employees are bracing for the cuts. Many have taken to Twitter to garner support for their colleagues, while others implored public radio fans to donate to their local stations.

"This week is heavy here @NPR," tweeted *Morning Edition* host Leila Fadel. "The layoffs become real and we will lose colleagues who work so hard to put on our programming everyday. We don't know who will go but we know that everyone who is here now... we need them. Tough days ahead."

NPR did not respond to *Hot Pod's* request on the timing of the layoffs. I'll have more for Insiders later this week on the extent of the cuts.

RadioGPT makes it easy to replace human DJs with bots

That's very reassuring, given the state of radio. *Axios Cleveland* reports that local business Futuri has launched a

product called RadioGPT, which can theoretically do most of the work of manning a radio station without human labor.

According to the website, it uses GPT-4-powered bots that can perform interstitial chats about the music lineup, local weather, and news and even field listener comments and questions. RadioGPT can also do tasks that would otherwise be the domain of interns and entry-level staffers, like creating complimentary blog posts, converting live shows into podcasts, and social media.

Unlike the deeply wonky *AI Radio*, which I reported on last month, this is not just a fun thought experiment. According to *Axios*, the product will debut next month with Alpha Media and Rogers Sports & Media, which represent more than 250 stations combined across the US and Canada.

Futuri CEO Daniel Anstandig told *Axios* that the product was meant to “save radio, not compete with it” by filling hours that stations can’t man anyway. “What we’re looking to do is augment a station’s ability to fill its programming with more live and local content,” he said.

The way Anstandig positions it is that for many radio stations, it’s AI or it’s nothing. That may be true in some cases, but the companies that have signed up so far aren’t exactly indies. It seems more likely that radio companies will have the opportunity to use this tool (or others like it) as a means to cut their labor force and reduce the already diminishing audio industry pipeline.

Maximum Fun podcast network converts to a worker-owned cooperative

Maximum Fun, the podcast network founded by *Bullseye* host Jesse Thorn, is transitioning from a more traditional corporate structure to a worker-owned cooperative (in the same vein as *Defector*). Maximum Fun’s two dozen employees will share ownership of and decision-making power over the company,

which produces comedy and pop culture shows like *The Adventure Zone* and *My Brother, My Brother and Me*.

“I didn’t build this company to be sold off to the highest bidder,” Thorn said in a statement. “I built it to make great stuff. I don’t trust big tech companies to steward this operation. I do trust the people who’ve built it with me.”

It is an unusual move in a time when studios seem to be consolidated under large corporations. But *Defector*, with its megahit *Normal Gossip* and highly respected sports and culture journalism, has shown that such arrangements can produce good work (and even be lucrative!). With so many people laid off from the big audio companies and creators’ increased awareness of the value of owning their work, I would not be surprised if we saw more smaller audio companies move in this direction. Though, that would probably look more like *Defector*, which was founded that way to begin with, than Maximum Fun, in which the owner willingly gives up most of his stake.

Spotify expands audiobook vertical to Canada

Spotify may still be figuring out the future of its audiobook business, but in the meantime, the company is expanding the vertical’s footprint. Today, the company announced that audiobooks will now be available for purchase in Canada. Spotify’s catalog includes more than 350,000 titles so far and was previously only available in the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand.

That’s all for now. See you next week.

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/3/21/23650783/chatgpt-radio-npr-layoff-podcast-spotify-audiobook>