

The Uncertain Future of Ham Radio

An interesting article on the [IEEE Spectrum website](#) describes some of the current challenges that ham radio faces.

One of the big questions is: what could draw younger people to ham radio? People used to be drawn to ham radio for its ability to provide:

- Communications with others while mobile or away from the home. Now we have cell phones.
- Communications With others around the globe. Now we have the internet.
- A platform to tinker and build equipment using the latest technologies. Now kids learn to program computers.

“Instead, many [younger hams] are interested in the capacity for public service, such as providing communications in the wake of a disaster, or event comms for activities like city marathons.”

Since the radio spectrum that ham operators use is a finite resource (in greater demand today), this raises a debate as to whether ham radio should be seen as a hobby or a public utility (see this [previous post](#)).¹⁾

On the bright side, cheap Chinese radios and SDRs are lowering the bar of entry for new hams in terms of cost, but even that can be a contentious issue.

“As Michel, the former ARRL CEO, puts it: ‘Every ham has [their] own perspective. What we’ve learned over the hundred-plus years is that there will always be these battles — AM modulation versus single-sideband modulation, whatever it may be. The technology evolves. And the marketplace will follow where the interests lie.’”

¹⁾

My personal opinion on this debate is that ham radio should be both a hobby and a public utility, but it should stay “open” in the sense that every transmission intercepted should be easily decodable.