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Calling for Shows

Foneshow uses "dumb phones" to change radio.

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By Erica Naone

Foneshow, one of the companies that demonstrated today at Venture Summit East in Boston, is using the low technology in many people's pockets to challenge the radio industry. Foneshow allows people to listen to radio programs by calling a number from their cell phones. Text messages let them know when new shows are available. The technology is simple, since the show is going out over the same voice channel used for a regular phone call. Foneshow identifies the numbers calling to hear a show and uses that information to save a listener's place in case the listener has to hang up and call back later. The company makes money by including advertising in the notification text messages, and by sharing revenue from interactive ads inside the radio programs with the programs' producers.

I tried out Foneshow, and was taken by its simplicity. So many things are being designed for iPhones and other high-end mobile devices, yet I'm always interested by companies that aim for the "dumb phones" that are carried by far more people. In addition to indie shows, Foneshow includes content from the likes of NPR and the *New York Times*.

In today's presentation, CEO Erik Schwartz described Foneshow as one effort to adapt radio to coming changes in the market. Like the newspaper industry, he said, radio is having difficulty measuring the effects of advertising, which is undermining its business model. Schwartz, however, is confident in the face of the radio industry's anxiety. "There's nothing I like better than a 20-billion-dollar-a-year industry that thinks it's doomed," he said.

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