

Cell Phone Collusion

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September 2019 issue, Orange Bytes

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For several years, I have noticed a few ads for cell phones that said they included an FM radio. By that I mean the actual electronic hardware that allows the cell phone to be used as a transistor radio and tune in to the local, over the air, FM radio broadcasts. I regretted that it was never the phone that I had, nor one with the FM radio tuner feature, whose other features fell short of acceptable. For a long time I have thought that having the FM radio feature in my cell phone would be very nice. I could tune into my favorite music station without having to install some streaming Application. I would not have to worry about streaming music using up my online data allocation. With it, if I lost a cell phone tower connection, it wouldn't matter. And potentially, in any kind of an emergency, I might be able to receive an FM radio broadcast when there was no cell service available.

Having received an email that suggested I read an article in their electronic magazine, I opened it. After reading the article, I noticed in the "You might also be interested in" section of the page, an article titled: " Samsung enabled FM radio on US unlocked Galaxy S9 and S9+ with ..." The opposite of unlocked of course, is locked.

A long story as to why, but I recently signed up with AT&T for a special deal they were offering. To wit, buy one Galaxy S9 and get one free if you sign up with us for two years. As a rule, when you sign up with a carrier for that kind of contract your phone is "locked" to their service. To me, that implied that I have a Galaxy S9 phone that has an FM tuner that I can use. That thought made me happy, but at the same time, a little confused. The last time that I had looked at the specifications for a Galaxy S9 phone, FM radio tuner was NOT on the list. So I went to AT&T online support to ask about it. I searched for AT&T online help and got this URL:
<https://www.att.com/devicehowto/index.html#!/?make=Samsung&model=SamsungG965>
U. The page title is: AT&T [Wireless Support](#), [Devices](#), [Samsung](#), Samsung Galaxy S9 / S9+.

When I got there, a line said: "How can we help you today?" I typed in "FM Radio."

The response was:

"We searched for 'FM Radio' in Device Support and didn't find anything."

Per the instructions, I shortened it to just 'Radio', but got the same response. I tried multiple variations of the search, but the circle always came back to; we don't admit to knowing anything about FM radio.

I then clicked on the online chat function and got Steve.

Steve: Hello! How may I help you today?

Steve: Hi! My name is Steve. How can I help?

Steve: Jim nice to meet you Please let me know how can I help you today ?

Jim: I am tired of going in circles looking for how to use the hardware FM Radio in my S9

Steve: Sure I can help you with that, Allow me a moment please

Jim: I am looking at websites that say the S9 has the FM radio tuner hardware but not how to use it/activate it/turn it on.....

Steve: Got it, first you need to have (wired) headphones or earbuds as they work like an antenna

Steve: I'm not sure about the steps

Steve: Allow me a moment please

Jim: I got the antenna part already. Even found one page that had a screen shot of the tuner

Steve: But that's not something you download it is supposed to be preinstalled in the phone

Steve: I'm having issues with the tools

Jim: pre-installed, after installed, I don't care. I just want to learn how to have it! when the auto (*online*) support asks what do I want help with and I type FM Radio or just Radio, it says it never heard of that and runs in circles, somebody needs to fix that piece of stupidity.

Steve: Gotcha

Steve: One moment please.

(while waiting, I went back and copied the article I had found)

Jim: 6/26/2018 If you're a person who loves FM radio and owns an unlocked variant of the Galaxy S9 and Galaxy S9+, you'll be happy to know the handsets are now enabling support for FM radio reception after their most recent updates. There was a bit of confusion earlier in the year when Samsung debuted its Galaxy S9 and Galaxy S9+. The firm advertised that FM reception was indeed a feature on both devices but failed to give details that it was only going to be available on carrier-branded units. This left those that purchased the unlocked model without the ability to tune in to the radio. While it probably wasn't a huge issue, it is good to see that Samsung has finally resolved the problem after three months.

Steve: Yes I double checked that on internet as well

Steve: I'm checking the manual but doesn't show me any info about it

Steve: Have you checked directly with Samsung Jim ?

Jim: NO I haven't. I didn't buy the phone from them, I bought it on a two-year contract with your employer.

Steve: Thanks for clarifying

Steve: Not really I'm even checking on Samsung's website and doesn't show me any info about it

Steve: Is the phone updated Jim?

Jim: It has been updated to Android 9.

Steve: Allow me to connect you with our Tech Support Team so they can better check this

Steve: Is that okay with you ?

Jim: sure, anything to get an answer

Steve: Thanks, please keep the chat window this might take few min

Jim: I will do that.

Steve has left the chat

You are being transferred, please hold...

Steve: We are currently experiencing very high chat volumes which may cause long delays. An agent will be with you as soon as possible.

==== quite a bit later =====

Agent Regina enters chat

Regina: Hi! My name is Regina. I'm happy to help! Please give me a moment to review your request.

Regina: No worries. I can help you with that. Can I have your name and wireless number please?

Jim: Jim Sanders 714-xxx-xxxx

Regina: Thank you.

Regina: Jim, I understand that, the issue is with the FM radio in the Galaxy S9 device.

Regina: I can completely understand your concern.

Regina: As this is the issue with the device application, it should be resolved by the Samsung team.

Jim: I am not concerned. I just want instructions from att on how to use a feature of my S9 phone

Regina: I understand that.

Regina: I will help you with the instructions.

Jim: That's nice because As noted before, when one types in FM Radio or just Radio, the what can we help you with screen says, "say what?" and runs in circles. That all by itself blows.

Regina: Usually FM radio apps will be paid apps.

Jim: We are talking about FM tuner hardware that is already in the phone. The same as if you turned on your transistor radio and started tuning to your favorite music station in your locality. DO you have to pay for that?

Regina: Generally, you will need to pay for the FM.

Regina: It will not be free in the galaxy phones.

Jim: I think you should transfer me to a supervisor as it is clear you are not sufficiently technically knowledgeable

Regina: Sure, Jim.

Regina has left the chat

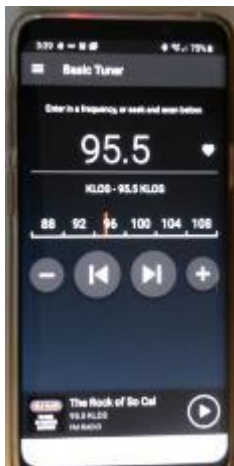
==== another wait =====

I then spent over a half hour chatting with the "supervisor" and largely got the same runaround. At one point I said that if AT&T is going to advertise a cell phone that has an FM radio tuner, they should support how to use it. He wanted proof that AT&T had advertised a radio with that feature, and I found one for a radio made by ZTE. We went around and around about whether or not it was AT&T's obligation to support the radios in the cell phones that they sell through agents like Best Buy. I pointed out they provide support/help with lots of other features of the phones they bundle with their service. He continued to maintain that it was not AT&T's responsibility, and that I should go talk to Samsung using the 800 number that he supplied.

So I did that. I spent quite a bit of time on the phone with a very nice Samsung representative that tried quite hard to be helpful. He agreed that yes, the Galaxy S9

does indeed have an FM tuner built into it. That it appeared that Samsung has a program that interfaces with the FM tuner chip but does not install it on phones that are shipped to the United States. He said that the program/app looked like it had to be installed at the factory and he could find nothing about installing it later on.

Further research revealed that the FM radio receiver function is built into the QUALCOMM modem chip that a lot of cell phone manufacturers use. That function is free to the cell phone manufacturer whether they care to use it or not. No extra charge! I normally don't care much for conspiracy theories, but I ran across a few more web pages that had a cynical article that suggested that AT&T and other carriers don't want to mention the feature as it would diminish their revenue from streaming music data usage. When you go to the www.samsung.com site and look up the specifications for the Galaxy S9, there is a long, long list of features, but NO mention of FM radio. Is there collusion between Samsung and the American carriers to influence the results in the market? The American people have a right to know! The FM radio stations of America should demand the Congressional Oversight Committee add this to their list of investigations.



On the BRIGHT SIDE, my research found two things that surprised me. First, there is an APP on the Google Play Store that has been there quite a while called NextRadio. It does exactly what I need, and that AT&T refused to acknowledge exists . NextRadio has two modes of operation. The basic tuner screen (see photo) and a radio station logo screen. The tuner screen allows you to enter a frequency directly. The tap on a logo screen (with call sign and frequency) is determined by the ZIP code you enter. NextRadio used to do streaming but stopped as Jan. 2019. Second, there is a list of 222 phones that the APP works on. The list is at: <https://nextradioapp.com/>. On the DARK SIDE, (well, disappointing anyway) several non-geek friends of mine treated the knowledge that their phone has a FM Radio tuner with an "OK, so what, ho-hum, who cares, my streaming works great" attitude. Meanwhile, I am enjoying listening to my favorite FM music stations even if I have to use the wired earbuds instead of my blue tooth headset.