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## Internet radio station dials in local bands

**Larry Rodgers**

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A lover of local music is breaking ground in Arizona by launching a commercial-free Internet radio station mixing homegrown talent with national acts.

The station, [www.KALTaz.com](http://www.KALTaz.com), is spotlighting 30 local acts in a battle of the bands that listeners can vote on through Dec. 25. The rock-focused station, which debuted Dec. 1, is the first of several that Scottsdale real-estate and entertainment attorney Sam Ciatu hopes to launch under the umbrella of Arizona Music Radio, which would also broadcast such formats as hip-hop, punk and country.

Ciatu, 48, says his goal is to get local bands "heard by more people than are going to hear them Tuesday night in a bar and wait three weeks to hear them again at some art festival."

The response from bands has been strong. About 80 submitted songs for consideration in the battle of the bands, which carries a top prize of \$1,000, and the 30 finalists are enjoying regular airplay on KALTaz.com.

A recent afternoon broadcast mixed such Arizona acts as the Pistoleros, the Ellington Effect and the Michael Gavin Band with Nickelback, Blues Traveler and other national powerhouses.

"I really like the format when they mix you with national acts," says Kyle Wilson, singer-guitarist in the Tempe-based Ellington Effect. "It kind of gives you credibility and at the same time it allows people that (might be) overwhelmed by all local music to have something that they're familiar with as well."

Ciatu says he hasn't found any other Arizona Internet stations following his non-commercial, all-local model, and only a handful nationwide. He asks bands to contribute \$38 a month to help pay for operating costs.

"I refer to it as a co-op," says Ciatu, who estimates that he has invested more than \$150,000 in broadcasting and recording equipment he has set up in a studio at his north Scottsdale home.

Although he hopes to someday break even on the venture, Ciatu says he won't sell advertising because "it really junks up the sound."

Wilson calls Ciatu's fee reasonable, given that each band is guaranteed airplay at least four times daily, or 112 times monthly.

The singer says his band has been contacted by several Internet stations outside Arizona seeking about \$50 a month to be heard with other unsigned acts. But because those stations mix bands from across the nation and don't spice up their playlists with established groups, Wilson and his three bandmates passed.

"I would say (KALTaz.com) is pretty unique," says Raghav Gupta, chief operating officer of [www.Live365.com](http://www.Live365.com), a site that hosts 6,000 Internet broadcasters. "I haven't come across any co-ops where bands basically chip in to make things happen."

Gupta says KALTaz.com is one of at least 12,000 Internet broadcasting operations nationwide, which range from a person playing his Led Zeppelin CD collection to such professional sites as KALTaz.com, which has purchased the licensing needed to play national acts.

Arizona bands also enjoy the spotlight on [www.azpunk.com](http://www.azpunk.com), but that site sells advertising and uses Live365.com to handle its music streaming.

Ciatu, in contrast, uses equipment in his home studio to create his playlists and broadcast.

"It started as a hobby," says Ciatu, a Valley resident since 1982 and a longtime fan of the Gin Blossoms, the Refreshments and other Arizona bands. "Then I recorded some people for free, and I added (a studio) onto my house. I upgraded the equipment, and it all works quite well from home."

Ciatu uses computers similar to those at larger commercial stations to set up his playlists and broadcasts. The main difference is that there is no airtime programmed in for banter or advertising.

There's minimal talk between some tracks, mainly to identify the station and mention its battle of the bands.

The genesis for KALTaz.com, Ciatu says, came as he stood in a nightclub thinking, "The only difference between the guys who are standing right here and playing and the guys on national radio is that somehow they got there. . . . The missing link is that somehow (national acts) got to be heard by more people."

Ciatu decided that if he was going to help Arizona bands close that gap while attracting listeners, he would need to mix local and national music.

"The idea is to give the (Arizona) bands a broader base of fans and to give those fans what they expect to hear on a radio station," including some national acts, Ciatu says.

Gupta of Live365.com is supportive of Ciatu's fledgling broadcasting operation:

"It's something the Internet is perfect for, which is putting people in touch with each other and . . . working for a common goal."

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