

What Broadband Era Are We In?

Taylor Swift's Eras Tour serves as a glittering example of the importance of following changes and trends in any industry – from music to broadband.

By Bryan J. Rader / Pavlov Media

Watching Taylor Swift float through her nationwide Eras Tour this summer symbolizes how much the music industry has changed over her career. Her set list is a mix of songs from each stage of her career and represents different periods of musical tastes. I reflected on how much the music industry has changed over the years too. Consider, for instance, when commercial radio came into existence during the 1930s and '40s. Americans sat around the family radio and listened to big band music. During this period, household purchases of radios nearly tripled.

This was followed by the advent of the record player, which saw its rise during the 1950s, led by the demand for great records from music artists such as Elvis. This era was followed by vinyl albums in the 1960s and 1970s, which drove record sales for several decades.

By the 1980s, compact discs replaced albums. CDs offered longer lifespans and better-quality listening experiences. Once again, at the turn of the century, innovation won out with the introduction of the iPod and iTunes, which offered individual purchases of songs for 99 cents each.

Today, even more music options are available, leveraging the internet for new ways to listen: Pandora, Apple Music and SiriusXM satellite are just a few options. Each music era was replaced by next-gen technology with newer, more customer-friendly business models.

BROADBAND ERAS MARKED BY NEW TECH

The broadband industry has gone through many of its own eras, which also are marked by new, innovative technologies and business models that replace older ones. Each era captures the minds of new investors, entrepreneurs and property owners who want to participate in new trends. Let's look at some eras for the broadband market.

During the 1980s and 1990s, analog cable TV defined the first era. The industry focused on installing satellite dishes to carry 40 or 50 programming channels customized for each community served. This involved one-way communication with limited bandwidth and minimal features other than character-generated community channels.

The digital age of multifamily tech followed. Residents wanted more channels, demanded HD services and began

to ask about high-speed internet, which was offered with a CMTS and a DOCSIS 1.0 cable modem.

During this time, property owners clamored for real "high-speed internet" any way they could get it. This meant begging a phone company for DSL or getting broadband from a PCO or cable company. It was a true arms race at the time, and capital flooded the industry looking for a winning play for internet to MDUs.

The next era began around 2005, when property owners no longer wanted "exclusive agreements" but sought to make two or more options available for new move-ins. AT&T U-verse, Verizon FiOS, DirecTV and others came to the rescue to offer incentives to create "choice" for residents.

About a decade later, another new era began, defined by MDU owners seeking gigabit speeds and fiber-to-the-home infrastructure. New business models were developed, some with door fees or other economic incentives for owners.

Today, yet another new era is beginning – this one, built on bulk internet, offers residents immediate access to broadband as quickly as they sign their leases. This led to the adoption of "managed Wi-Fi" as the premier platform and business model for multifamily.

Just as Taylor Swift sings through each era of her musical career, the broadband industry continues to evolve from analog cable to managed Wi-Fi and beyond. It's the same as the music industry moving from 45 singles to subscription streaming music apps. Following these technology changes and consumer demands is important and easy to do – or at least easier than getting floor seats to Taylor Swift's Eras Tour! 🎵



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