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Your smartphone and car radio should hook up

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The more connected we are to our smartphones and iPods, the more we want access to them, especially inside our cars.

But that's where many of us hit the sound barrier.

"Many customers come to us with vehicles that are not factory equipped to allow them enjoy their MP3 players, smartphones or other recording devices through their automobiles," said Yahaya Asaad, sales manager at Car Stereo Warehouse on Independence Boulevard.

Nearly 4 of 5 customers are looking for a way to connect their smartphones, navigation apps, music or other recorded content to their car's audio system and speakers, Asaad said.

Adding a Bluetooth wireless connection, hard-wiring an auxiliary cable system, or using a basic plug-in wireless FM transmitter are some of the options for getting content from your smart device to the car speakers. As might be expected, each option has advantages and disadvantages.

FM transmitter

The most immediate and least expensive solution for those who want to play music from a mobile device through an older, factory-installed car audio system is a plug-and-play FM transmitter such as the **JamKast FM** modulator by iSimple.

Retailing for \$47 at BestBuy (<http://tinyurl.com/mwj29db>), this device plugs directly into the car's cigarette lighter. It detects your switched-on iPod, iPhone, Android smartphone, BlackBerry or portable media player and converts the signal to FM, finds an available channel and then broadcasts directly through

• What to consider

- How much (if any) upfront programming is necessary? Some devices require a great deal of data transfer and programming to take advantage of advanced features.
- Does the device provide music muting with incoming calls? Most do, but it's something to consider.
- Should you consider an update to a Bluetooth radio such as Pioneer's AppRadio? Costs, including installation, may be comparable to other solutions, and benefits may be considerable given advances in technology.

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your car's audio system.

Some models include text-on-radio technology, which shares information about a song or other content on a back-lit LED screen.

While this option is perhaps the least intrusive and least expensive solution, critics say the sound quality is inconsistent.

"There are inherent limitations to FM transmitters, and strength of signal, proximity to transmitters and related issues can make for a great deal of static and fading in and out of sound quality," Asaad said. "These are not products I recommend without reservations."

Auxiliary plug-ins

An auxiliary audio interface is a wired connection to your smartphone, tablet or mp3 player. The **iSimple Tranzit USB** also connects to an antenna bypass for playback through your car's FM stereo. It may require an antenna adapter. Check for compatibility with your system. Retail for \$89.95 at <http://bit.ly/N3ChfQ>.

Bluetooth wireless connections

An **iSimple TranzitBlu** system uses Bluetooth technology for a wireless connection to your car's audio system. Simply choose a frequency for your music to play on. Many users say the quality of the audio is superior to FM transmitters. While both technologies use radio waves, Bluetooth signals travel a shorter distance, allowing for less distortion. This can be installed in a few hours for about \$200, Asaad said. (www.isimplesolutions.com/TranzitBLUHF). Given the complexity of the installation process, this type of upgrade is not recommended for the do-it-yourselfer.

"Bluetooth and auxiliary interface represent the vast majority of the work we do for those wishing to maintain their factory-installed equipment yet wanting to access their recorded content and have hands-free phone features," said Asaad.

While iSimple and other manufacturers' products and kits are compatible with many manufacturers' equipment, they are not universal. Check compatibility of your audio system with your installation specialist.

Universal Bluetooth kits and adapters

For those looking for a basic solution that lets them make calls hands-free using voice commands, a



universal Bluetooth kit may be a good option. The **Parrot CK3000 Evolution** retails for \$108.50 at Amazon (<http://tinyurl.com/p84msd8>) and can be professionally installed for about \$50.

If you own a Dual or Axxera multimedia receiver without Bluetooth technology for streaming and hands-free calling, you're not at a loss. The **Dual Bluetooth Adapter** clips onto a visor and connects with a cable to your audio receiver to give you an interface between your phone and stereo. When you make or answer a call, the audio is channeled through the stereo and speakers. Music and other audio from your Bluetooth-enabled smartphone also plays through the stereo. For use specifically with Dual model DXV3D or Axxera model AXV3D multimedia car receivers. \$50 from Crutchfield (<http://tinyurl.com/ovvj76m>).

Aftermarket solutions

Attractive new features and competitive prices make it worthwhile to consider replacing your car stereo. Aftermarket Audio systems such as **Pioneer's AppRadio 3** are attention-getters. Among its features are Bluetooth and a smartphone link adapter for access to phone apps such as navigation, music and calendar. \$379 at Sonic Electronix (<http://tinyurl.com/q5f4vgy>). Installation is extra and would likely run close to \$200.

"The growth in demand for this technology stems from the dramatic increase in smartphone applications and a greater familiarity with existing technology and willingness to take advantage of it," said Asaad. "I think we're just seeing the tip of the iceberg."



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