

The British are coming!

Pure Evoke Flow – A GlobalNet Review

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In the years before the advent of television, the family radio was the entertainment centerpiece of the home. In many cases, they were not just functional devices for picking up radio stations that carried your favorite program: they were elegant design pieces that enhanced the décor of a room.

We have long since moved past those days in the modern, digital world. Or have we?

There is still a market for elegantly designed radios that accentuate not only their owners' embrace of new technology, but also the desire to have a cool-looking gadget they can show off to their friends. After all, who says you can't have the latest in high-tech gadgetry and look good doing it?

That seems to be the mindset of the makers of the PURE Evoke Flow: to combine technology and style in a radio that is sure to get more than its share of attention.

❖ A Little Background

The U.K.-based PURE has been making DAB, WiFi and other digital-based radios in their home country since 2002. They now claim to be the largest digital radio manufacturer in the world, even though they hadn't tried to market products in the United States until recently. The Evoke Flow marks one of their flagship entries into the competitive, U.S. WiFi radio race.

PURE brings to the table a host of attractively-designed radios that have already found a considerable following in the U.K. and Australia. Units such as the PURE Sensia and the recently released PURE 1-S, which is designed in collaboration with Marshall Amplification to resemble a small Marshall guitar amplifier, have pushed the boundaries of how a digital radio is supposed to look.

Will this British invasion set the WiFi radio industry on its ear? Or will it be a one-hit wonder? Let's take a look at their first salvo, the Evoke Flow.

❖ Out of the Box

The packaging for the Evoke flow is as modern as the radio itself. There are minimal packaging materials inside, following the Earth-friendly trend of many modern technology leaders such as Apple. Usually, the unit itself is packaged inside a plastic bag or wrap and then placed in the box. The Evoke Flow, however, is



placed inside an eco-friendly, cloth drawstring bag.

Inside is the unit itself and a "wall-wart" AC power adapter. The unit will also operate via a rechargeable PURE ChargePAK, which is sold separately through the PURE Web site.

The elegance of the Evoke Flow's design is evident the moment you take it from the cloth bag. The cabinet itself is solidly constructed and finished in a high-gloss piano black. Its retro style gives a nod to the old portable transistor radios, with a few noticeable upgrades. While the cabinet is rather boxy, the unit has some stylish curves in the touch-sensitive handle (which is actually the snooze button during alarm use) and in the silver knobs and speaker grille.

Once plugged in, the modern feel of the radio becomes evident. The main display is an OLED display lit in green. Likewise, green is

the color for the touch-sensitive power button, as well as other buttons located above the two main-control knobs. These silver, push-button control knobs adjust volume, navigate menus, and are used in character entry.

A large number of WiFi radios are still using single color displays (usually amber, green, or blue), but the trendsetters are going full-color. PURE does have a full-color display option with its Sensia unit, but it would have enhanced the general attractiveness of the Evoke Flow as well.

On the rear of the unit, you will find a telescoping-whip antenna for FM reception, four 1/8-inch jacks: an auxiliary speaker jack (PURE makes an optional matching speaker that can be purchased through their Web site), a headphone jack (it seemed a bit odd this wasn't on the front of the unit), a stereo out, and an auxiliary in. There is also a mini-USB port that can be used for an Ethernet connection.



While most users will have some sort of WiFi option in their homes, it seemed odd that there was no Ethernet port on the Evoke Flow. This seems to be standard on most U.S.-made WiFi radios. The mini-USB option can still provide this functionality, but it requires a USB ethernet adapter, which few users are likely to possess. It seems to me it would have been easier to put an Ethernet port on the unit instead. This isn't a deal breaker, unless of course you prefer a hard-wired connection.

Other accessories not included with the Evoke Flow, but available for purchase through the Web site, are a remote control and an iPod docking station. The lack of a standard docking station is understandable, since only a portion of users would need this. But a remote control seems to be an increasingly common accessory included by manufacturers. It would have been a nice plus.

MT FIRST LOOK RATING

Audio Quality – 4.5 out of 5 stars

Adding the optional speaker would push this to a 5 star rating

Performance – 3 out of 5 stars

The cumbersome interface is the main drawback

Features – 3 out of 5 stars

No included remote and a proprietary battery pack are minuses; the included FM radio tuner and optional docking station are pluses

Design/Appearance – 4 out of 5 stars

A very attractive unit; a full-color display would make this a 5 star rating

Overall Rating – 3 out of 5 stars

It is a strong WiFi radio contender, but comes up short because of its interface and shortage of U.S. stations.

❖ Performance Test

Tuning In

Looks are one thing, but how does the Evoke Flow perform? Is it a dead-serious WiFi radio option, or an elegant, digital knick-knack?

Upon first use, you will need to enter a little bit of information, such as your preferred language and, if using a WiFi network, your network information, including any passwords. I found the internal WiFi antenna to be adequate to reach my wireless-G router from the back room of my apartment. I tried it out with a lower-powered router and it did have some issues, but most Linksys or other major routers should work just fine with this radio.

But, sorry, you aren't ready to start surfing the world's radio stations just yet. In order to tune in Internet radio stations on the Evoke Flow, you must first register at PURE's "The Lounge" interface. This should be a relatively easy experience, right? Ehhhhh...

I use Apple's Safari Web browser. While this doesn't prevent me from using The Lounge Web site, a message does pop up, saying I might be better off using Internet Explorer or Firefox. If this happens to you, don't be alarmed, but you may run into issues when streaming certain stations through The Lounge Web site.

Once at the Web site, you have to register a new account. When I went to do this, I was once again hit with a notification that the Web site doesn't like Safari, even though I earlier checked the box to not receive further notification of this.

To start, you will enter your information to register. Then PURE sends you an activation link to your email. Once you click on the link, you are registered and ready to get started.

The Web site is nice, but it is a bit off-putting for PURE to make it a requirement. Most WiFi radio makers use their Web site portal as an optional way to save favorite stations, browse station lists, etc. The Evoke Flow *requires* you to use their Web site before you can listen to a single stream. While this may not bother every user, to me it felt like an unnecessary extra step, especially when you consider that other WiFi radios on the market such as Logitech's Squeezebox, the Sangean line, and others can begin tuning stations almost instantly out of the box.

To be the company's first entry into the U.S. market, I found the selection of U.S. stations on the PURE Lounge interface to be seriously lacking. WiFi radios that use the RadioTime or Reciva interfaces have a considerable selection of U.S. and worldwide stations to choose from. PURE's proprietary interface does not.

I did a search first for several high-powered and well-known U.S. stations. Large stations such as WBBM in Chicago, KNX in Los Angeles and KMOX in St. Louis were available. Curiously, stations such as WLAC in Nashville, WWL in New Orleans, and others were not.

A search for all U.S. stations showed as of press time, that 3,904 stations were available. However, this includes internet-only radio stations as well as terrestrial broadcasts. While listeners looking for stations in larger markets

such as Atlanta, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York should be able find most of their stations, those in secondary or smaller markets are likely out of luck.

In addition, the number of stations from other parts of the globe seemed to be much smaller compared to those of the RadioTime and Reciva units. This might be something that will improve in time as more stations are added. However, when there are units on the market that can immediately tune in more streams, it puts the Evoke Flow behind the rest of the pack.

There is a way to request PURE add a station to their stream list. This can be found under the "Contact Us" portion of the Lounge Web site.

You can search for stations through the radio's interface, but it is much easier to do on The Lounge Web site. I see this as another drawback: The whole point of purchasing a WiFi radio is to enable tuning in Internet radio stations untethered from the computer. When the interface and radio content are more easily accessible through the Web site, Evoke Flow's operation proves more cumbersome compared to other units on the market.



Audio and Operation

Once you are able to start listening to stations on the Evoke Flow, it actually turns out to be quite a nice radio. The audio quality is exceptional, especially considering it is only coming out of a three-inch, seven-watt speaker.

With the volume about halfway up, the audio was more than enough to be clearly heard with the radio about six to seven feet away. Turning the volume up to higher levels didn't result in any distinct distortion and enhanced the lower frequencies even more. I can easily imagine this radio being adequate in an outdoor environment (porch or poolside) for playing music. It would be more than enough for a clock radio or background music/talk in an office environment.

I did quite enjoy the touch-sensitive buttons, and navigating through the menu seemed easy enough. Here's a tip if you get stuck trying to figure out how to search for stations: turn the select knob. This brings up The Lounge menu, where you can access your favorites (which are saved on the Web site), browse stations, browse Podcasts, or select from PURE sounds (an eclectic collection of recorded sounds from nature, environments, and vehicles).

I would stack the audio quality of the Evoke Flow favorably against just about any

other WiFi radio I have used, including the Squeezebox and the Grace GDI-IR3020. It may not be better than them, but is certainly as good.

A nice advantage that the Evoke Flow has over other WiFi radios is the inclusion of an FM radio. The RDS-enabled tuner is set to default to a "seek tune" when using the select knob. For those wanting to manually control the frequency to be tuned, you can change this setting under "options/FM settings/FM tuning."

I tuned in a couple of the local Greenville, South Carolina stations and was surprised at the quality of signal reception. They came in crisp and clear, with strong audio. Tuning in more distant stations seemed to be hit or miss. I tried tuning in some of the more commonly heard stations from Charlotte, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia in our area, and only one Atlanta station was audible and it was not very strong.

The auxiliary input works perfectly, and for those wanting to run a secondary audio source through the Evoke Flow, they will find rich, full audio coming through the speaker. You can also set the Evoke Flow to stream audio files from your home computer, as other units on the market allow you to do.

❖ Final Words

I really started to appreciate this radio the more I used it. As with any product, there are trade-offs; you just have to decide how important certain things are to you when making your decision.

Visually, the Evoke Flow is an attractive WiFi radio that combines a retro-feel with a modern twist. The audio quality of the Evoke Flow is among the best of any WiFi radio I have tested. The included FM radio is a nice addition that makes the Evoke Flow a go-to radio when the Internet goes down (or if the power is out, if you have the ChargePAK).

The only glaring issue of the Evoke Flow is the interface. The requirement to go through the Web site to get started listening to stations, combined with the low number of stations listed compared to other radios on the market, are two big issues that would make me think twice before I put forward the \$229 suggested retail price for the Evoke Flow.

If you are looking for a basic WiFi radio to listen to the large stations in the U.S. as well as a good number of international stations, if you don't mind working through a Web site interface to get started (and in all reality, it is the easier way to do most of your station searching), and you want something with strong audio quality and a built-in FM radio, you should definitely consider the Evoke Flow.

For those used to a RadioTime or Reciva interface, I would suggest you browse The Lounge Web site to see how you like this interface and the selection of stations before making your decision. If you like what you see, then this radio is definitely an option you should consider.

WEB SITES

PURE U.S. Web site: www.pure.com/us/
The Lounge: www.thelounge.com/