NEW YORK (Reuters) - Fans of U.S. satellite radio have been waiting eagerly for nearly a year to get XM or Sirius on to their cell phones.

But as the two satellite radio providers carefully ponder their mobile strategies and chew over business plans, a small group of technically savvy devotees are taking matters into their own hands.

Grassroots software and Web developers have found ways to tap into XM Satellite Radio Holdings Inc. (Nasdaq:XMSR - news) and Sirius Satellite Radio Inc.'s (Nasdaq:SIRI - news) Web sites to stream music channels on to Windows-powered smartphones and other devices.

Most have given their work away for free to other fans since late last year -- running into conflict with the wireless business strategies of the satellite radio providers.

"I'm not always near a PC, but I already have a cell phone," said David Bressler, who wrote a piece of software to listen to Sirius in his office, which blocks satellite radio signals.

"I like Sirius, I promote Sirius to everyone I talk to," he said in a phone interview, adding it took him about an hour last December to write the software, SiriusWM5.

XM, the top U.S. satellite radio service provider with about 6 million subscribers, and Sirius, which serves about 4 million, have both said that going mobile was an important part of their business expansion.

But so far, only a few of Sirius' channels are available on one wireless provider's network, Sprint Nextel (NYSE:S - news).

Meanwhile, XM has threatened to take legal action. In early February, a law firm representing the company sent a cease and desist letter to a developer, citing infringement of its trademark.
A spokesperson for Sirius said its lawyers are also pursuing the issue. "Our lawyers are diligently pursuing this," a Sirius spokesman said.

"We've indicated time and again, we expect our service and technology to be widely available in portable products and we continue to explore opportunities to do that," said XM spokesman Chance Patterson. "These incidents don't have any impact on those plans.

GRASSROOTS COMPETITION

To be sure, the addressable market is tiny. Users have to own relatively new Microsoft Windows Mobile-powered smartphones or PocketPC handheld devices and troll online message boards to locate the software or Web site links.

As a service to paying subscribers, XM and Sirius offer only a limited selection of their music channels on the Web. Sirius' hugely popular shows by ribald radio host Howard Stern, for example, are not available on its Web site.

Nonetheless, marginal competitive distractions, have a way of haunting technology companies. Consider how the dorm room and garage passions of Microsoft Corp. (Nasdaq:MSFT - news) Chairman Bill Gates and Apple Computer Inc. (Nasdaq:AAPL - news) Chief Executive Officer Steve Jobs, dropouts from Harvard University and Reed College, respectively, took on IBM (NYSE:IBM - news) and now own the personal computer market.

"We don't want to get into any trouble," said Wayne, the developer of PocketXM Radio, who declined to give his full name for fear of retribution. He said his software, subsequently renamed Pocket Satellite Radio, is no longer for sale.

It had been sold at www.eBooksoftwarehouse.com, which is registered to Wayne Jiang, based in Texas.

The potential legal quagmire such workarounds represent has not shaken the resolve of new developers, some of whom would rather continue to quietly tinker without disturbance.

"I have not been contacted. I do not wish to be contacted by XM," said Younes Oughla, who created the Web site MiniXM.com over four weekends in his home office in West New York, New Jersey.

"I make sure that people know I'm not affiliated with XM to avoid confusion," Oughla said, pointing to a disclaimer on his site, www.minixm.com.

Another developer, whose programing allows Windows Mobile phone users to easily link to XM radio Web casts, said he wrote the software to cut down on clutter. His programing was widely distributed off his blog.

"I prefer to carry one device," Nick Krewson, one of the earliest developers of software that connected to XM, said.

On Internet message boards, such as HowardForums.com, where tech and phone geeks converge, Bressler has turned down offers to accept fees for his software.

"If Sirius wants the application and wants to develop it further, it's all theirs," he said.
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