Getting Started in Digital Amateur Radio

Introduction: Amateur radio enthusiasts are increasingly drawn to the captivating world of digital modes, enhancing communication possibilities, and opening up new avenues for exploration. This guide focuses on initiating amateurs into digital modes on High Frequency (HF) radio, offering insights into the necessary hardware, software, and resources to get started.

HF Radio Focus: While digital modes can be explored on VHF, UHF, and higher bands, this guide concentrates on the HF spectrum. HF radio provides a robust platform for digital communication, offering enhanced propagation capabilities and a wider range of possibilities for digital mode enthusiasts.

Hardware Connections: Before diving into digital modes, establishing a connection between the radio and the computer is essential. Some radios, like the IC-761, are equipped to decode certain digital modes directly with the addition of a keyboard. Newer radios often feature built-in digital capabilities through USB connections, eliminating the need for external sound cards. For radios without USB ports, an alternative is utilizing a sound card, such as the Tigertronics Signalink USB Interface, available through ham radio outlets. Ensure to request the correct cable when purchasing.

For video tutorials on hardware connections, refer to KE0OG, Dave Casler's insightful videos on YouTube, including "Soundcards and the SignaLink USB (#307)" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COmSkT06_CY&list=PLA69irDAF7c7d9JiegVjZ-qiLSOs8YGF2&index=2 and "Setting up for Digital Modes, AD#25." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_As1xTP-M04&list=PLA69irDAF7c7d9JiegVjZ-qiLSOs8YGF2&index=3&t=1271s

Driver Installation: If your radio requires a direct connection to the computer, download and install the appropriate drivers. Ensuring compatibility is crucial for seamless communication between the radio and computer.

Software for Decoding: To decode digital modes, software is a necessity. While some options like DM 780 from Ham Radio Deluxe come at a cost, most decoding software is available for free. This guide focuses on FlDigi, a versatile and widely used decoding software.

For step-by-step instructions on setting up FlDigi, Dave Casler provides an excellent video tutorial titled "Installing FLDIGI for amateur radio digital modes: AD#26." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvOJFFkYlAs&list=PLA69irDAF7c7d9JiegVjZ-qiLSOs8YGF2&index=5. While the video is 7 years old, it is still pertinent. Additional and newer instructional videos on FlDigi can be found by searching YouTube.

Conclusion: Armed with the right hardware, software, and knowledge, you are now ready to embark on the exciting journey of digital modes in amateur radio. The guidance provided here, along with the recommended videos, should help you navigate the setup process effortlessly.

As you delve into the digital world of amateur radio, remember to explore various modes, participate in the ongoing learning process, and, most importantly, enjoy the experience. Good luck, and we look forward to your active participation in the upcoming Digital Challenge.

73, N8MKG Dennis Jarzombek