

Live streaming taking off in SA

Internationally, live streaming is rising fast as a form of entertainment with YouTube providing more than six billion hours of streamed video content every month to viewers. SkyRoomLive (SRL), supported by Virgin Mobile South Africa, is giving music fans the opportunity to watch top South African music events via their computers and connected devices.



Image: www.freedigitalphotos.net

For the past three years, American music festival Coachella has been broadcasting its three-day event, featuring over 60 artists, live on YouTube. In its first year it attracted nearly four million views. Apple does something similar with the iTunes Festival, which live streams to iPhone, iPad and Apple TV users. South by South West (SXSW) and Live Aid are but two of many more events using live streaming to grab large audiences.

According to streaming service provider Ooyala, users watch more live streaming content in a single sitting than video-on-demand (VOD). While the average archived video played on a mobile phone or tablet takes up two to four minutes of a user's time, live streaming averages three to seven minutes. On a PC or connected television the gap is even bigger with an average of five minutes for VOD, but over 40 minutes for live streaming. An interesting finding, as current perceptions are that viewers of online video content prefer snack-sized consumption.

With the popularity of live streaming platforms growing internationally, it seemed only fitting that the trend would find its way into the South African music lovers market. SkyRoomLive was launched in 2012 and in two years has perfected itself as a platform for both new and established artists to offer live performances, which are filmed and broadcast in HD and 3D, onto social networks and via the SRL website.

On-demand viewing

In addition, these clips are made available for on-demand viewing. The site hosts local and international artists like hip hop star Reason, rockers The Parlotones, Mi Casa, Mos Def, Hip Hop Pantsula and more.

Earlier this year, Virgin Mobile South Africa teamed up with SkyRoomLive with the aim of supporting this pioneering technology platform that showcases local musical talent through its Urban Sessions music events. These events are also

streamed live across the globe in addition to highlights of the show, which are broadcast on SABC 1.

According to Vanda Harries, Virgin Mobile South Africa's Head of Brand and Communications: "The rising trend towards live streaming via innovative technology-based platforms such as SkyRoomLive, provided an ideal opportunity to be part of a driving force in this revolution. The SRL platform also taps into some of the key imperatives for Virgin Mobile by supporting and foster young home-grown talent."

In the last year, SRL has enjoyed a 1000% growth and serves over 60,000 users a month - a massive number for a South African site and impressive even by global standards. With the average user consuming over 28 minutes of content per sitting, it's clear to see that the demand for such a platform is present. Though local streaming statistics are hard to come by, a 2012 expose into local streaming radio audience figures places SkyRoomLive's local peers far behind its own numbers.

An amazingly visceral medium

Eban Olivier founder of SkyRoomLive and MD of Mushroom Broadcast said: "If you think about it, video is an amazingly visceral medium and music is one of our most universal creative outlets. Combining the two has always been powerful - just look at MTV. Today's technology makes it simple to stream a live experience to fans via laptops, smartphones and tablets. We had high hopes when launching SRL, but even those couldn't compete with the amazing uptake."

Karl Rogers of iRocke, a major international live streaming curation hub said: "The music world has noticed this massive new pipeline to fans, especially when it comes to streaming live performances. It's a very democratic platform. These days it doesn't cost that much money to produce a live audio feed. Video feeds are also much more economical for everyone involved. Any artists can have access to it, which is wonderful."

Rogers also pointed out that several major international artists have adopted the concept, including Justin Timberlake and Prince. Jack White of White Stripes fame's Third Man Records offers live chats and concert streams to platinum subscribers.

All of the above has spawned an industry of live streaming hubs for concerts, including iRocke, the invite-only Boiler Room, German juggernaut AMPYA and the media-savvy Red Bull Studios. Although South Africa has recently experienced a rise in live audio streaming, such as Gareth Cliff's Cliff Central and the sports-focused Ballz Radio, SkyRoomLive stands out among its local peers with its live and archived concert videos and large global footprint driven by the passion of its founders for music and the live experience.

The unexpected is a big factor

"With live shows you never know what is going to happen, so the unexpected is a big factor," said Rogers. "There is also the immediacy. You can't pause a live show and come back to it later. If you get a link to a live stream, you can check it out next week. I think artists are beginning to understand that they need to start entertaining the online audience as opposed to just the crowd."

Olivier sees each of SRL's successes as validation of live concert streaming's future. "This is not a fad. In fact, the first live audio concert stream happened back in 1996. This has matured to the perfect storm of today's devices, online access, tech-savvy music fans and forward-thinking artists."

Rogers agreed, seeing this as only the beginning: "When every artist realises they have more potential broadcasting power than some of the major television networks, I think there will be a big light bulb moment in the industry that moves live streaming into the mainstream of the artist's mind. This has a chance to globally rival the market size of recorded music and physical live concerts. We see it as the most exciting opportunity in music."

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