

# The SABC is alive with the sound of telephones

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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The thought occurred to me the other day when I was reading about the pathos of the national broadcaster canning a programme because the ANC wasn't invited, that good old aunty SABC is partially alive to the sound of cell phones and landlines.

What I am getting at is that while things are pretty bad at the SABC, they could be a lot worse were it not for the still relatively exorbitant costs and dismal speed of cellular data added to a recent history of Telkom doing all in its power to ensure that South Africans could only connect to the internet at a great cost and at the speed of ox-wagons.

## Chunks of ads

If South Africa had reasonably priced internet access and decent download and upload speeds, the online environment would be biting far bigger chunks from the advertising pie.

And consequently, the SABC would not have the benefit of the ad and sponsorship revenue it is enjoying at present

Having just come back from the United States where I enjoyed free public-WiFi speeds at, for example, Miami airport of 25mbps download and a remarkable 24mps upload as well as pretty quick free WiFi on a number of tour busses, I have realised that what Telkom calls "broadband" in its ads, is like calling my mother-in-law's rusting 1976 VW beetle a sports car.

## Three G-whiz folks

The same applies to our cellphone networks offering fancy 3G data packages that are so far removed from broadband that they actually *do* make my mother-in-law's rusting 1976 Beetle feel like a sport car.

The other day mine actually managed to download some emails at the frighteningly fast rate of 900 bits/second. Dammit, I could have hired an overweight traffic light vendor with a forked stick to deliver my emails faster and cheaper.

When you are able to experience proper, inexpensive broadband as I did in Japan a decade ago, where they had reached 100mps, only then can you fully appreciate the real power of smartphones, tablets and services such as Netflix.

If I were the SABC with its policy of not paying for new programmes but rather digging MacGyver out of its dusty cellars and running re-runs of re-runs, I would be wetting myself.

## Least of their problems

Frankly, the fact that the SABC board continues to be perceived to be dysfunctional and with the level of paranoia growing with regard to not doing anything that could possibly annoy the ANC, these are the least of their worries.

In my opinion both MultiChoice and e.tv have positioned themselves relatively well in terms of delivering quality content - yes, both of them do repeats but not to the frenetic extent of the SABC. In fact, all TV channels have to rely on repeats because there is simply not enough production capacity in the world to be able to feed the global TV monster with new material day in and day out.

Like SAA and other parastatals, the SABC is trying to be a business but has so many unbusinesslike policies and pressures that its sustainability is dwindling into the realms of fantasy.

## Bailout kings

And it is costing ordinary South Africans dearly, who are not only paying for outmoded and one-sided licence fees but are also supplementing these with continuous bailouts.

The continuing pumping of taxpayers' money into the SABC and SAA is not sustaining their respective business models but simply funding campaigns to make it as difficult as possible for private sector stations and airlines to do business in what is supposed to be a free-market society.

It is going to be interesting to see what happens when eventually, South Africa gets broadband fast enough to allow smartphones, tablets and laptops to show content in real time without the ubiquitous buffering that afflicts the South African interweb and also to download movies in a few minutes.

It is a shame that the SABC is allowing political paranoia, continuous board infighting and good old-fashioned panicking to distract it from the real challenges it is facing.

## ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on [moerdykc@gmail.com](mailto:moerdykc@gmail.com) and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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