

702 takes to Twitter

By [Alastair Teeling-Smith](#) 24 Feb 2009

Four weeks ago Talk Radio 702 started to experiment with Twitter... and what a few weeks it's been!

At Talk Radio 702 we like to think we have a good interactive relationship with our audience. If something happens in Gauteng, the chances are that someone will give us a call, drop us an email or send us an SMS. Anything from a traffic light being out on the corner of Rivonia Road and Grayston Drive to floods in Alex.

If it happens, we'll hear about it. Talk Radio 702 is a giant clearing house of information. We broadcast news and information to our listeners but also receive it from them. It's a two-way thing. If they're talking about it, so are we.

And that's why we are having such fun with Twitter.

We started experimenting with Facebook last year. The great thing about all these social media platforms is the way we can use them to interact with our audience. We set up a [Facebook group](#) asking listeners what they wanted to hear on 702. We've had some great suggestions from the group for shows.

It's also a new way of doing business. Opening yourself up, being transparent, making yourself vulnerable. Using social media platforms means that your audience can post things and say things about you that you may not like. You can't control or manage what people are going to say about you. You have to have faith in yourself and your brand when using third party social media platforms.

Tweeting on twitter

Just over four weeks ago we started flirting with Twitter, and what a great relationship we've had so far! [See our profile at [@radio702](#)]. Twitter's ideal for radio. It's such a great fit, particularly with talk radio and the interactive nature of our format.

What have we used it for?

When I started tweeting, I wasn't really sure why we should be doing it. From last year I'd had a gut feeling that we should be playing in this space and I signed up, but was not too sure what to do with it!

One of our freelance presenters, Simon Dingle, [@simondingle](#), finally convinced me to take the plunge. I set up the 702 profile and started following a few people such as [@simondingle](#) and [@barackobama](#) [I began following [@radio702](#) almost immediately - Bizcommunity.com assistant editor [@SimoneBiz](#)] I was slightly startled but delighted when Barack Obama started following 702.

Talk Radio 702 punches way above its weight in the media space. "But surely Barack Obama can't really be too interested in what is happening on 702?," I thought. Turns out he pretty much auto-follows anyone, although disappointingly he's stopped tweeting since being inaugurated, despite reports of his special presidential encrypted Blackberry. I suppose he doesn't need Twitter any more. Unlike DA leader Helen Zille, [@helenzille](#), who started tweeting two weeks ago.

The first tweet I sent out four weeks ago was "Jenny is talking about SAA crew arrested at Heathrow for drugs". A touch of déjà vu about that particular tweet!

The more I tweeted, the more followers we got. We're close to 350 followers at the moment. That's a lot of followers, compared to some of the other South African media groups that are using twitter.

But the thing about social media is that it's not just about numbers. Talk Radio 702's followers are an influential group of people. And they all have their own networks to which 702's messages - tweets - can be forwarded and spread. It's all about

the community of people that follow you. That's part of the power of social media.

I've been tweeting about what happening on the radio. Hopefully, with these tip-offs, our followers will tune in if they are interested in the topic or guest. I've also sent tweets about what's coming up on 702. Tweets about things in which I think c audience may be interested. There's a service element to these tweets. I've also been sending breaking news tweets. [By way our sister brand *Eyewitness News* has recently just started a Twitter news feed: [@ewnupdates](#).]

Twittering on Carl Niehaus

Twittering, in my brief experience, seems to work best when there's a big story, for example the Carl Niehaus fall-from-gra story.

The story broke in the *Mail & Guardian* two Fridays ago. After seeing the M&G's story and hearing John Robbie speaking about it on 702. I sent this tweet:

“ M&G has story of 'tearful' Carl Niehaus admitting to fraud ... John Robbie speaks to him after 7am. [6:59AM Feb 13th](#) from Power Twitter ”

Just after Robbie's interview with Carl Niehaus at 7:20am I sent this update:

“ The ANC's Carl Niehaus has offered his resignation as ANC spin doctor this morning following the M&G story. [7:28 AM Feb 13th](#) from Power Twitter ”

We got the podcast of the interview up by just after 8am and then I sent this:

“ The ANC's Carl Niehaus tells John he'll resign ... in a very emotional interview. The podcast: » [link to tinyurl.com](#) [8:23 AM Feb 13th](#) from Power Twitter ”

It became the issue of the day on 702:

“ Redi Direko about to replay John Robbie's interview with Carl Niehaus. [9:07 AM Feb 13th](#) from Power Twitter ”

Lots of media, including News24.com, picked up on the story and published the transcript, which I RT (retweeted) in case our followers had missed the radio interview or had not listened to the podcast:

“ RT@ [News24](#) Niehaus: I am mortified: ANC spokesperson Carl Niehaus says he is "mortified" by a short-lived attempt » [link to Niehaus: I am mortified: South Africa: Politics: News24](#) [1:37 PM Feb 13th](#) from Power Twitter ”

And this article was posted:

“ Carl Niehaus fraud admission while working for the GEDA putting political heat on Gauteng Premier Paul Mashatile. » [link to bit.ly](#) [10:51 PM Feb 13th](#) from TweetDeck ”

I then let listeners know that Bruce Whitfield was going to discuss the issue from a corporate governance point of view on World at Six show:

“ Bruce Whitfield's World@Six looking at corporate governance issues in the light of the Carl Niehaus story. [4:17 PM](#) ”

[Feb 13th](#) from TweetDeck ”

And finally, at around 4:50pm the news broke on 702 that the ANC was removing Carl Niehaus as its spin doctor. I was still in traffic at the corner of Bompas and Oxford roads at the time, and sent this tweet from my cellphone:

“ Carl Niehaus to step down as ANC national spokesperson .. More on 702 shortly. [4:56 PM Feb 13th](#) from mobile web ”

The first time round, the ANC did not accept his resignation, and the ANC said that he was to be “re-deployed” within the ANC. The weekend newspapers had a field day, including revelations in the *Sunday Times* about Carl Niehaus not paying his rent.



[click to enlarge](#)

That was one of the issues picked up on Monday morning on the various talk shows on 702, including on Direko's show:

“ On Redi this morning ... more on Carl Niehaus [9:04 AM Feb 16th](#) from TweetDeck ”

Sister station 94.7 Highveld Stereo had fun with the issue on its breakfast show, the Rude Awakening. It was worth letting my followers about it:

“ You've got to take a listen to this: Whackhead and Bongani from our sister radio station 94.7 singing about Carl Niehaus » [link to bit.ly 10:56 AM Feb 17th](#) from TweetDeck ”

There was more on Carl Niehaus on Chris Gibbons' Midday Report on 702:

“ The latest in the Carl Niehaus saga coming up in Chris Gibbons' Midday Report at 12 noon. [12:00 AM Feb 16th](#) from TweetDeck ”

The afternoon edition of *The Star* on that Monday afternoon had a very creative front page:

“ Look out for the powerful front page of the Star this afternoon ... Carl Niehaus portrayed as Pinocchio. [3:06 AM Feb 16th](#) from TweetDeck ”



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On the Tuesday morning, the ANC finally accepted Carl Niehaus' resignation:

“ *The ANC's NWC have giving Carl Niehaus a leave of absence to sort out his personal financial problems. [10:33 AM Feb 17th](#) from TweetDeck* ”

The Carl Niehaus story was still an issue on 702 on Wednesday morning. John Robbie tackled the ANC's Jessie Durate:

“ *Carl Niehaus resigns ... but why was he appointed if the ANC knew he was guilty of fraud, John Robbie asks Jessie Durate, 7:20am [6:52 AM Feb 18th](#) from TweetDeck* ”

Direko took on the ANC's Gwede Mantashe a little later:

“ *ANC Sec Gen Gwede Mantashe on the Carl Niehaus saga .. on with Redi at 9:05am [8:55 AM Feb 18th](#) from TweetDeck* ”

And so the Carl Niehaus saga continued...

Feedback and interaction

But tweeting is not just one-way traffic; it's a two-way interactive process. We've also had great feedback from followers about what they want to hear on 702, as well as suggestions for interviews.

We've interviewed a number of followers. Recent examples include [@Twestival_Jozi](#) about the recent Twestival, [@granthornton](#) on the Budget speech and [@AfricanABC](#) on his African ABC.

For us, the strength of Twitter is its interactive nature - its ability to engage and interact with our followers - giving us yet another platform which we can use to interact with our audience.

• Updated and adapted from [original blog post published on Moral Fibre](#) on 18 February 2009

For more:

- MarkLives.com: [MyNews24 shows how media can use Twitter](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alastair Teeling-Smith is Talk Radio 702's programme manager. He started as a producer at the radio station and produced just about every show on the station, including the breakfast show, before becoming programme manager. Alastair has recently been experimenting with social media as a way of interacting with listeners. Contact Alastair on AlastairT@702.co.za and follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/radio702>.

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