

# Radio is losing its intelligence (part I)

By [Anthony Duke](#)

22 Mar 2012

Next week I start listening to entrants in the [MTN Radio Awards](#) for the third year\*. The awards themselves have vastly improved but I doubt if the content quality will indicate the same. This is not necessarily the fault of the entrants themselves but a more fundamental reason in that there is a general dearth of quality management to develop the talent pool.

In my circles, the jury is in... The verdict? "Radio has lost its intelligence." Commercial music radio is the main culprit but it is rarely seen anywhere.

## Call me old school

Call me old school if you will, but I remember a time when I felt as if I were the only one listening. In fact, that is what I had reaffirmed at the London School of Broadcasting in 1984. We're not talking to "all you people out there in radioland... we're talking to just you because you are the most important person in the world!"

It was called *one-to-one* radio and it worked.

Now *pretend* I am a listener to 5FM and one afternoon I decide to listen in to the Drive Show. I feel like an intruder. There is a conversation going on in the studio but it certainly isn't with me.

A while ago, I felt that if I asked to be included, I would get a begrudging "... If you must". Now I feel as if the answer would be "Puhleeze...we're busy here"! My tutor at the broadcast school called them "Discy Jokeys" but what I wouldn't do to have one or two of them back!

## Programme managers haven't got a clue

In consultation work I meet programme managers who will espouse the *direct rules of engagement* but they haven't got a clue what it means and how to instil it in their protégé presenters. They have heard it mentioned but don't know where it came from or what it was based upon.

These days, when presenters/DJs are talking, I have to wade through a myriad of crap such as a sponsor's web address, station's web address, gig guide address, mobi address, numerous telephone numbers, name of the song, artist, the old standby - the time check described in Shakespearean prose - a whole lot of "*umms*", "*ahs*", "*errs*", "*of course*" and "*coming your way*" or similar DJ speak.

At no time do I feel as I have a mutual companionship with the individual or do I hear something that actually makes me think. Excepting, of course, to think that we have a bunch of tw\*ts on air. The ingenuity of some of the radio luminaries of history is absolutely nowhere to be found amongst the pretenders of today. There are exceptions but I don't need two hands to count them.

Because of the dreaded SMS I have to hear what Karen in Kloof or Henry in Hatfield has on their minds, not what is on the presenter's. Original thought is banished and appears to have gotten lost among the glamour, the aaawesum celeb gossip, anything arb that is available from the 'net or where the presenter is gigging this weekend. Or, if the presenter still has nothing to say, he or she will revert to.... aaagghhh... radio clichés!

### **Radio invented a million clichés more**

All of us use clichés but radio invented a million more. "Welcome to the show", "between now and...", "don't go away", "don't touch that dial", "coming up after this", "coming your way right now", "a little bit later", "but anyway", "send a shout out", "how ya doin?" [as if I really care], "thank you for joining me" [because I'm coming apart]. If all this fails, the presenter will just repeat everything said last time and read from the cover notes.

The spectrum is public domain, folks. It is a privilege for you to use it, not a right. And, if you are the lucky ones with a licence, please don't insult my intelligence with your lack of it.

My grumble is about the fact that one of the main causes is the lack of the same knowledge in management at radio stations. People who have arrived at the top for every reason except being competent programmers. Indeed, station and programme managers are being appointed who come from marketing or sales but not with any substantial experience at the heart of the radio business.

It follows that those appointed to programming have not got a role model to glean information from, look up to, admire and become the best at their craft. Instead, they become complacent that everything is ok and long lunches are a way of ignoring the problem. If they even recognise for a moment that there is one!

### **Easy meat**

Ever seen the dread, anxiety, horror and apprehension when the inexperienced station and programme manager has to sit down and do a critique with a popular heavyweight from the breakfast or drive show? They are easy meat and the quickest route to the end of a distressing meeting is to agree with the superstar. Phew!

Witness also the fear or panic at what the latest research says every two months and the truth is, by the time any thought is given to remedial action, never mind implementation thereof, the next [RAMS wave](#) is published. The last one goes into file 13.

I've written and taught a lot on some of the finer aspects of engaging the listener so, in [part II](#), indulge me as I mention a few.

*Link to part II added at 12.19pm on 26 March 2012.*

*\*Update at 1.43pm on 19 April 2012: Anthony Duke withdrew from judging the 2012 MTN Radio Awards after he decided to mention 5FM by name in this contributor piece. He only informed Bizcommunity.com of this on 17 April 2012.*

## **ABOUT ANTHONY DUKE**

Anthony Duke co-founded Capital Radio in 1979, managed 5FM, Good Hope FM and did strategies for all SABC Radio stations as manager of radio training at the corporation. Today he is retired but still consults. Email him at [anthonyduke@vodamail.co.za](mailto:anthonyduke@vodamail.co.za) and connect on LinkedIn.

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