

Radio: good buy or good bye?



Bylssa Sikiti da Silva

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Some say radio has stalled and lacks "creativity", while others believe it is being killed by over-regulation - an issue they say ICASA should look at. Doomsayers categorically say it is slowly but surely following print to the graveyard, where it's already resting in peace, waiting for Judgement Day. The *Journal of Marketing* meeting this morning, Thursday, 31 March 2011, heard insightful testimonies about radio. Is it dead or alive?

"No, I don't think radio is dead. If you are going to manage radio like you did 10 years ago, then you are in trouble," Omar Essack, Kagiso Media broadcasting executive director, told a packed hall at the Michelangelo Hotel in Sandton, Johannesburg.

"You have to invest in content and talent"

"You have to invest in content and talent, and ensure that you put up an exciting format and new opportunities online to test technology. Radio is not going anywhere. "There is a commitment to ensure that we continue growing. You will lose out if you are dull and boring," Essack pointed out, cursing doomsayers.

Primedia Broadcasting CEO Terry Volkwyn echoed Essack's sentiments, saying: "Radio is not a dying media. This is what they were saying four years ago. It was said then that radio will die because digital radio will take over."

Volkwyn, who said one of the radio's key strengths is immediacy, admitted that investing in digital is expensive but one does not have a choice. She urged radio owners to work together with their advertisers and understand what they need.

"Sit down with the brand and understand what they need in order to come up with a better strategy," she said.

Need a better understand of target market

Speaking about fragmentation and competition that have rocked the industry, Starcom MediaVest CEO Gordon Patterson said advertisers need to have a better understanding of their target market before they indulge in any sort of radio advertising process.

"If you don't, you will lose your target market. The currency we use now to plan for radio is not as strong and robust as it is used to be," Patterson revealed, blaming marketers for failing to understand that adequate research matters a lot in the radio business.

Volkwyn concurred: "Radio research and statistics we use in this country are not strong enough to give us the insight we need to implement changes. It is critical that all of us sit down to look for ways of doing a better research."

Some wonder why community radio, which industry watchers say has been growing at a faster pace, continue to be overlooked by advertisers, who are keen to 'tie the knot' with well-established commercial stations boasting huge listenerships.

Ignoring community radio is totally wrong

Patterson, however, said ignoring community radio platforms is totally wrong. "Community radio compliments community newspapers," he said. "It is flexible and offers critical flashpoints, and the kind of flexibility you will never find on regional radio."

Natasha Basson, MTN acting brand and communication GM, also urged advertisers to form relationships with community radio, bearing in mind that the platform is good and strong as ever.

"As MTN, we do look at specific programmes and DJs, and you also need innovative media to support you."

Depending on the budget, Patterson said he would look at complimenting radio with visual medium. "Endorse and know the DJs. Get involved with them and find out where their children go to school. It is called how to leverage assets that are presented to you," he also suggested.

"Don't be so naive by looking at the 'low' listenership of community radio. Look beyond that and be precise. Spillage will rob you of continuity."

Critical point is continuity

Furthermore, Patterson said radio advertising's critical point is continuity. "It does not matter whether it is in community or commercial radio. You have to go step by step - if you get the first results, you then move to the next step."

The issue of discount and rate cards was also debated, with The Media Connection sales manager Rachelle Jacques saying her organisation is not going to undermine community radio on the basis that these stations will give clients discount because they are desperately in need of business.

Jacques said, first of all, community radio's rates are ridiculously low and wanting further discounts will not help their cause.

"Radio stations are different from one another. Every station has its own group people it serves. So we tell clients that this station will not work for you, find another one," she added.

Fairness urged

Patterson urged fairness when dealing with both set of customers - big brands and small customers. "Surely MTN won't be happy when it learns that a small cafe owner got a big discount because it is small."

Volkwyn urged radio sales people to act professionally when seeking business, and this she said included dressing well and formally. "They need to sit down and spend time and listen to the client and find out what they need instead of just selling themselves right away," she said.

"Radio still works if it is used correctly. If not, it will not work," Patterson concluded.

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ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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