

Clare Bowen from Radiocentre sees radio differently

 By Jessica Tennant

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Clare Bowen, head of creative development at Radiocentre, a trade body for commercial radio in the UK, presented a two-hour workshop for radio writers and creatives on making radio that wows, followed by a presentation on radio effectiveness for media strategists and marketers, based on its ['See Radio Differently'](#) campaign, on Monday, 12 June at Primedia Place in Sandton.

Primedia brought Bowen to South Africa to share insights with its employees and clients into radio theories and best practice; to encourage ways of thinking about radio from creative points of view and to suggest ways to approach radio briefs and optimise creative ideas.

In an exclusive interview between sessions, Bowen and I discussed why creativity and effectiveness go hand in hand and why radio is still very much an effective medium for advertising when done well.

What makes radio effective is that communicating through sound is simple. Everybody responds to sonic cues in some way. "Spoken and musical messaging can be a real shorthand to your emotions and can be very convincing," says Bowen, "and radio is also a great reach medium, so you can talk to lots of people through your messaging at any given time." And on a practical level, production costs are low. "The cost of radio is more expensive here, but production costs generally can be a bit fleet of foot on radio – you can be on air more quickly, so you can be more reactive."



Clare Bowen

Bowen mentioned that there are also parallels in terms of how radio is perceived between the UK and SA. "Radio is a larger medium over here than it is in the UK. In the UK it's the second largest after TV, but it only counts for about 3% of advertising revenues, whereas over here that figure is much higher, but that's partly due to the explosion of digital channels and digital players taking ad share at the moment (in the UK), so it's our job to fight the corner and convince advertisers why radio is a cost-effective and effective medium."

Especially in the UK with it being in a state of flux following Brexit, there's been a lot of investigation into the use of online media and as a result people are growing distrustful of online channels. "Something we're really seeing is people wanting to turn to a medium that they can trust.

"There have been prolific stories in the press about YouTube advertising alongside terrorist videos, but perhaps more of a problem is inventory not being seen by anyone," she adds.

But radio stands to benefit from this, she says. "It's accountable, people know where it goes and the data with which radio effectiveness is measured is robust."

The key message is one of simplicity

For advertisers investing in radio, the key message is one of simplicity. “If you’re working with an agency, I think the key thing to nail is a sonic identity for your brand.” This should happen early on in the process, advises Bowen, and you should be consistent with your sonic cues. “Radio is often treated as a last-minute tactical medium,” she adds, suggesting you put a template in place for your brand, as a framework that you can deploy throughout your advertising so that your brand message is clear and consistent. “Using radio for brand building and having those blocks in place for building the brand, I think, is the most important thing to consider, and to not just think of it as a one-off or one-by-one execution.”

In their study, [The long and the short of it](#), Les Binet and Peter Field say there’s a connection between creativity and effectiveness because creativity drives emotion and emotion is actually what drives purchasing behaviour. But this is a hard thing to get right, says Bowen. “It’s quite easy to get radio wrong as it can sound clunky and unnatural, but actually investing in creating a well-written, well-produced script is well-paid dividends in terms of effectiveness. Creativity and effectiveness go hand in hand, and so it’s quite helpful for creatives to hear that and to see some of the data to prove it.”

Here’s an example of radio done well, and one of Bowen’s favourite case studies.

“There’s an ad that I played today. It is a Black Pencil winner from a few years ago and it’s called K9 (excuse the pun) FM – a [radio station for dogs](#). It’s a piece of audio branded content, based on the insight that dogs get destructive when left on their own at home because they’re missing their owners. They worked with dog psychologists to identify sounds that dogs would find soothing and included amusingly-written dialogue that would appeal to owners as well. It’s very funny to listen to, it bears repeat listening and it helped create fame for the brand.”

Watch and learn.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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