

Tricks of the trade: improving your on-air content

 By [Caren Olsen](#)

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The South African Advertising Research Foundation ([SAARF](#)) invited a number of top players in the radio industry to speak at a recent Community Radio Forum, giving community radio delegates advice on everything from programming to marketing. This is my advice for presenters on how to deliver a show with the kind of on-air content that attracts and retains listeners.

It takes more than just a good on-air voice to be a great presenter. If you aspire to being a great presenter, with a top radio show, you need to be delivering consistently good content, and we're not just talking the playlist here (that's a separate topic all on its own).

Great content takes preparation, and is as much about what you say as how you say it. Here are some of my tips on delivering great on-air content.

Before the show

You need to prepare if you're going to entertain listeners for three hours. Presenters often forget just how easy it is for listeners (and management) to pick up on a show that has not been properly prepared for. You're aiming for content links that are short and to the point, and that entertain your listeners, preventing them from changing radio stations.

Preparation for a radio show begins the moment the show ends. What exactly does preparation entail?

- **Stick to the criteria**

When preparing for your show, ensure at all times that whatever you plan to talk about is:

- Informative
- Entertaining
- Relevant

Your content needs to check the box with at least one of these.

- **Read, listen and watch**

Read newspapers, internet news sites and watch TV news bulletins every day. There is nothing worse than a

presenter commenting on a current affairs issue that is out of date, or commenting inaccurately on that event.

And never trust emailed stories from listeners. It has happened many times that stations air inaccuracies about events, such as reporting on a death without checking the source.

Until you've checked your sources, you should never blindly air something. Not only does it damage your credibility, but it could also lead to the injured parties taking legal action.

- **Listen to your own station**

You need to know what is happening on your station. If you listen to your station, you'll have a greater understanding of what other presenters are discussing or covering, which helps you tie in better with the rest of the station.

During the show

First, if you have nothing entertaining, informative or relevant to say, rather keep quiet. Avoid repeating yourself, and try to be consistent and creative.

When you do speak, don't speak down to your listeners. Speak *to* them, not *at* them. And don't "sing", with your voice going up and down. Speak as you would when talking to a friend. Avoid getting into a pattern of highs and lows.

In terms of content, be sure you adhere to the BCCSA Code of Conduct, and don't tell cultural or religious jokes or make insensitive comments on air.

Work to create listener loyalty. Your listeners are tuned in for a reason. They enjoy your show and trust you to deliver - don't let them down or leave them out of your conversations, and avoid in-house jokes that will make listeners feel left out. A listener who enjoys your company is bound to spread the word, so don't fail him or her.

Economy of words

Remember to forward/back announce the songs for listeners only just tuning in. And stick to linear intros and outros. For example, it's better to say "That was Family Affair by Mary J Blige on Radio FM", rather than "You're with me, Alfred Einstein on Radio FM and that was Family Affair by Mary J Blige". In radio, airtime is money and economy of words is everything.

Unless it's a repetitive chorus, don't fade the vocals on tracks, and don't ride the fader over an intro or outro. Just bring it down slightly and keep it there. Ups and downs sound confusing on air and are unprofessional.

And don't promo the end of your shift. To ensure listeners stay tuned to your station, they need to feel comfortable with the next presenter. When you talk about your shift ending, it sends a message that the listener can tune out because their favorite music/personality is now leaving the building.

Quarter hour maintenance

Probably one of the most important tasks you have as a presenter is to increase listener loyalty through constant innovation, so that you hold your listeners' attention. Since radio listenership is measured in quarter hours, presenters need to ensure that every 15 minutes they give listeners a reason to stay tuned in.

Here are a few tips on how to do this:

- Unless there is news or sport on the half-hour, make sure you play music on the quarter hour, to keep listeners tuned in.

- All features must appeal to the station's target audience and complement the station's programming strategy.
- Keep links brief
- Use throw-forwards to highlight activity later in the show. A general rule would be to promo every interesting feature or element in the 20 minutes prior. Good throw-forwards don't give everything away. The idea is to tease your listeners. So don't say: "Coming up after this, the new song by Whitney Houston called 'One of those days'". Rather just tease your listener that the latest Whitney track is coming up.
- The best throw-forwards add a little extra information that you have researched, for example "Coming up, the new song by Whitney Houston that's been two years in the making".
- And the last rule of throw-forwards? Make sure the tease is worth it.

ABOUT CAREN OLSEN

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