

The resurrection of YFM?

Earlier this year, YFM launched its new strategy, choosing not to retain old voices as part of its new lineup for 2008/9. GP's hottest frequency, as it's affectionately known, opted for programming filled with unknown voices from the station's Y Academy. Bizcommunity.com recently caught up with programme manager Vukile Zondi to find out more about the Joburg Rosebank-based station.

By [Tshepiso Seopa](#) 24 Nov 2008

The annual radio-restructuring period saw many stations unveiling their changes on April Fool's Day, at which point YFM's listenership wasn't that healthy. The youth radio station was quiet about its changes, even when heavyweight DJ "Rudeboy" Paul, who hosted the breakfast show, admitted that he was leaving after being with station for about a decade.

Almost eight months has gone by since 1 April, the day that got a [lot of people talking](#) and the latest RAMS figures show a steady increase of audiences.

Made sense

According to Zondi, it made sense for the station to cut ties with the old guard as they had outgrown the brand Y. The move not to renew contracts of some staff members was part of the new strategy. Explains Zondi, "Because, their priorities had changed and they lost touch of the youth reality and the mindset. We needed a new boost of energy, people who could still enjoy what they are doing, who move within the same circles as Y's target audience."

"Any top brand has to stay relevant to young people, and this challenge is half-met when its representative appeal to the youth immediately. It's important that the strategy of our radio station adapts to meet the needs of our audience, which has resulted in the programming and marketing changes over the past few years."

Before YFM, kwaito music had never been played on a radio station before. There was a need for a new youth identity, for black pride, he says. "At some point Y was kind of losing the plot, one of the reasons a change in strategy was needed. And DJ Sbu was recalled to finish his unfinished business with the station."

"To us, DJ Sbu represents the essence of what our station is about. He speaks directly to our audience, he has developed a really loyal following, and approaches the entire deal with real commitment."

Core audience

"YFM's core audience is young South Africans who are imaginative, curious and ambitious. They are continuously seeking new ways to improve their lives. YFM tries to reflect a progressive, youthful audience by providing programming that complements their lifestyles. That means the brand and its look need to reflect on key principles."

"The graduates from the Y Academy were given primetime slots within the station's lineup to attract the young audiences back. Because they can identify with the target audience, and they know what young people want and are going through. YFM aims to be cool, cutting edge and to be the voice of the youth. And the

increment of figures... is a confirmation that things are going ahead as planned,” points out Zondi.

Internal changes

According to Zondi, it is not only the on-air staff that got the chop for not fitting with the station's new strategy. Other departments, including sales, were also changed and replaced with people who are young or young at heart.

“In the past, sales and programming operated separately; they did not speak with one voice. The messages that came out were not the same. Sales sold spots to meet targets, DJs presented their shows and that was it. But now the new team is singing the same tune: the focus is to sell the brand Y, a lifestyle brand. The two departments (sales and programming) share a common goal, which is to tell advertisers and businesses that Y is a way of communicating with the young people.”

Asked if the message is being heard, Zondi says there have been turbulent times, once everyone understood what was expected of them in pursuit of the advertising pie. “The figures speak for themselves: we have to put things into perspective, make advertisers see beyond a radio station, make them see YFM as a way of talking to the youth.”

Even though Zondi did not want to reveal what the station is working on ahead of next year, he did point out that Y will pursue the matter that it lost against Durban-based iGagasi FM, in which it lodged a complaint against iGagasi with ICASA, complaining that iGagasi's current programming strategy is in contravention of its licence condition.

Can't wait to find out what's cooking at Y next year!

ABOUT TSHEPISO SEOPA

Tshepiso Seopa was a junior journalist at Bizcommunity.com.
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