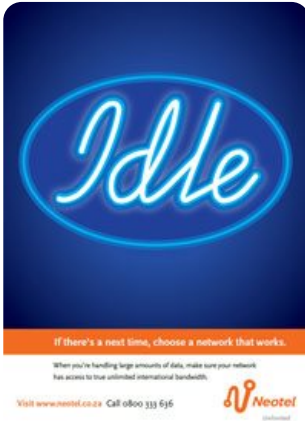


Final Idols report, M-Net's hard lessons

Private broadcaster M-Net this afternoon, Friday, 15 May 2009, released the final report into the internal technical investigation of the mistake-prone and controversial Idols V singing competition, revealing that the independent report - which many were wishing for - will take time.



Bylssa Sikiti da Silva 15 May 2009



Neotel and its agency Tequila have been quick to capitalise on the Idols sms voting fiasco, initiating a viral campaign which Bizcommunity.com received late on Friday afternoon, 15 May 2009.

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“We are very comfortable that this report reveals exactly the correct findings of what we thought it would be,” M-Net CEO Patricia Scholtemeyer told journalists at a hasty media briefing in Randburg, Johannesburg, this afternoon.

“I want to make this point very clear that it was M-Net that picked up the problem and went public with it, promising that we would get to the bottom of the problem and ensure that in the future this kind of situation does not happen again.” she said, adding that the broadcaster has learned a great deal of lessons.

The external review, which will be conducted by communications engineering consultant Dr Neël Smuts, may take a while to complete due to the complexity of the multiple technical issues at hand.

Internal investigation

According to the internal investigation conducted by Grapevine Interactive, the M-Net supplier planned to double the amount of SMS votes for this season, never expecting that the show would be so popular that the broadcaster would receive an unprecedented five times the number of SMS votes in the closing hour of the show.

And that is where the equation got complicated, creating capacity problems.

Scholtemeyer said: “We have to fully understand that what went wrong during the Idols final, not only for the sake of transparency, but to learn valuable lessons to eliminate similar problems in the future.

“In future, we will work far more closely with the mobile network operators and our service provider to ensure

the success of interactive voting during the voting process. We will also implement the KPMG recommendations.”

There may also be possible format and certain technical changes to future Idols seasons, including increased capacity planning and additional and ongoing monitoring throughout the value chain in real time. In addition, M-Net may consider eliminating SMS voting from future shows or limiting the number of votes per cell phone number.

Apologised

Nick Orton, Grapevine Interactive, apologised for everything that has happened, revealing that the traffic could not reach the firm's platform so it could not give it information on time.

“I apologise. We have learned a lot and about what we can do next time.”

Asked about the credibility of the show, which many said has been tainted, Scholtemeyer quickly went to the defensive, saying, “While I understand the public's outrage, I must also say that I disagree that our credibility is in the line.

“I have no doubt on my mind that our credibility is more intact than it was before because we were the ones who first acknowledged the problem and decided to take steps to fix it. Not the other way round.”

Viewers' prize

Scholtemeyer also pointed out that, as there were more than 600 000 SMS votes that were not included in the viewers' draw, M-Net has decided to rectify the situation by awarding another viewer's prize - a Citroen C1. This draw, she said, will be overseen by KPMG on Tuesday 19 May.

“We are hosting a public event for the sponsors to hand over Jason's prizes on Wednesday 20 May at which time the viewer's prize will also be handed over,” she said.

“Our two Idols will be singing at the Indian Premier League [closing] ceremony at Liberty Life Wanderers [Sunday 24 May] - viewed by more than 30 million people worldwide.”

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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