

Going public on broadcasting

Fred never really laughed. Rather, his copious belly would tremble, and then akin to an underground tremor, a rumble would emit. His beard softened the sound into a grumbling guffaw. He was in such a state when I arrived. "The electronic media market place is a mess", he said.

 By [Fred Says...](#) 17 Oct 2004

The SABC/etv debate had got to him.

There is the SABC, supported by not only the impressive expertise of the entire cabinet (that seems to ensure that their news and programming is relevant to the people and therefore popular), but the fiscus helps with the odd cash shortfall, as well. They also have the license fees to dig into, and on top of all of that they also sell advertising time.

Poor etv has only its commercial guile and cunning to survive. And they have shareholders to answer to. At last they are in the "black", as it were.

Despite all the advantages that are bestowed, the SABC managed a very small R3 million "profit", in their latest financial year. One recent report had etv projecting an enormous (comparatively) R100 million profit. Capital needs to keep the mighty SABC going is estimated at over R350 million. At the current rate that would take over 100 years to re-coup!

These oddities aside, the argument goes that we, the public, need a public broadcaster. And, public broadcasters are not supposed to make money. Their role is to spend it, for good causes. This is a view that governments (and the politicians that are in control) would naturally support. How else would they promote their good works and scintillating personalities? These are valid and appropriate good causes, after all.

Fred had the answer.

Let all TV broadcasters "donate" say, an hour each day to the government, to do with it, what they will. The department of communications would produce the shows and they would control every aspect. To sweeten the deal, any advertising sold in this "open" time would go to Mama Manto's brave efforts to inform the population regarding the efficacy of certain veggies in her fight against HIV/AIDS. Or she and her cabinet colleagues could haggle for this time, privately, within the ANC structures.

At least we, the public, would be saved from stupid debates, bad programming and a bottomless pit of costs. Sycophantic advertisers, keen on polishing their BEE marbles, would also have the perfect place to advertise their wares as well.

Ideas like this have an uncanny knack of taking root. I made a mental note to warn Paul Haupt at SAARF not to measure these public broadcast hours on TAMS, to save the government the embarrassment of how poorly they perform in terms of viewers.

ABOUT FRED SAYS...

With piercing blue eyes, a full set of clean underwear, his own hair - although it's mostly on his manly chest now - and stealth-like in his entry into his favourite bosveld watering hole, 'FRED' is clearly a legend in his own laager. An insider with so many years experience in the industry that he's forgotten where time began and advertising ended, he will be writing for Bizcommunity.com weekly to bring us the industry news you thought was safely swept under the rug, lurking there with the rest of South Africa's scandals and dirty laundry! If you'd like all correspondence with Fred can be sent via the editor@biz-community.com

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