

Future of online radio in listener's hands

The online radio station of the future will not be driven by the whims of a programme director, but by the wisdom of the crowd. Listeners will be able to drive the playlist themselves through their votes, allowing them to discover new songs and get closer to the music.



By [Attila Bernariusz](#) 21 Apr 2013

Many digital radio stations are still stuck in the old paradigm of DJs and hosts rather than harnessing the technology to make their product more engaging and interactive. Consumers on the internet are not passive consumers of content - they want to shape it. Crowdsourcing technologies are one way of helping them to feel closer to the curation of the content and to get them more excited about the music.

Kagiso Digital, the incubator of new digital opportunities for Kagiso Media, is pioneering this sort of business model through Ja.fm, a digital music offering that drives its playlists through its listeners' votes. The station offers an exclusively Afrikaans playlist, with users able to choose between three songs that could potentially play next. The song with the most positive votes and least negative votes plays next.

Power in the listener's hands

This puts the power right in the listener's hands. It's an approach that keeps people coming back - they want to know which songs will 'win', they want to help their favourites to be play-listed, and they love the feeling of influencing 'the show'.

The online audio audience is smaller than its terrestrial counterparts mostly on account of the cost of connectivity, and access devices, as well as low broadband penetration in broader South Africa, amongst both low and high LSM groups. But the upside for advertisers is that the audience is highly engaged and usually a member of the upper LSM brackets. It is a niche audience, but one that can be tracked and targeted with a great deal of efficacy.

Specific audiences

Advertisers can talk to specific audiences with less wastage and high levels of efficiency, making it a viable channel for a wide range of campaigns.

Ja.fm has grown its audience from around 4,500 unique browsers to nearly 100,000 between January 2012 and January 2013. This represents a 2000%-plus growth in unique listeners for the station, which launched in 2000.

The audience is already fairly sizable and very viable for advertisers. The stage is set for significant growth in the next few years as bandwidth becomes cheaper and as solutions to beam digital radio into the more common place 'radio receiver'. I am optimistic for a bright future for digital radio.

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