



**"Radio Talent Management: Reshaped and Redefined"
Financial Mail Redzone in association with National Association of
Broadcasters (NAB)
11 May 2021 09h00 – 10h00**

Webinar report

The webinar was led by Arye Kellman, Chief Creative Officer, TILT, with the following panel members: Hulisani Ravele, Radio Presenter on 947 Weekend Breakfast; John Walls, Co-owner, Ultimate Media; Anthony Soglo, Business Manager: Fortune Combo R2000, SAFM & Lotus FM; and Martin Bester, Radio Presenter of "Breakfast with Martin Bester", Jacaranda FM.

Background

The nature of radio presenting as we know it, is evolving at a rapid rate. With advances in technology resulting in additional engagement mechanisms, paired with changes in skill sets needed these days, it's necessary for the industry to rethink their talent management approach and how best to utilise on-air personalities to engage audiences and provide value to marketers.

No longer can a broadcaster just be a presenter with a good voice. Now they need to be engaging and multi-skilled as social media influencers, content providers, story tellers, brand ambassadors and have an impact on their community. So, how compelling is talent nowadays? And how can marketers leverage and utilise radio stations and their presenters efficiently?

What makes good broadcasting and what sets radio apart from social media?

Good broadcasting occurs when there is a connection between station/presenter and the listener and commercial client. The fact that there is a human behind the microphone elevates radio above all other media platforms, as it is human nature that can evoke emotion and create real connections and two-way communication within the setting of a community. Social media on the other hand is one-on-one and mainly one-directional communication. Furthermore, it is easy to 'miss the moment' on social media when not online, whereas listeners, in essence, 'create an appointment' with radio when tuning in.

The old adage that *Content is King* remains as true today as in the past. The credibility of radio is particularly important, especially in this current era of so much disinformation. The trust people have in radio and the information they receive from it has been highlighted in the pandemic when listeners turned to radio, not only for a sense of connection with other listeners, but to listen to their trusted presenters. Periods of trauma repeatedly prove these enduring qualities of radio.

The fact that social media has taken over from radio as the 'immediate media platform' and that there are many similarities between the two has placed pressure on the latter. However, while radio may no longer be the first platform from which to

receive information, it has an established reputation as the first platform from which to receive correct, credible information – that is the difference.

Using radio or social media for marketing purposes?

When considering return on investment, radio reaches 89% of South Africans, with only television of all other media platforms coming close to that figure.

The advertiser or media planner may be faced with a dilemma when influencers and radio stations/programmes offer similar followers/listenership. However, while numbers are important, equally important is considering the differences in and complexities of the reach – and how the influencers built up the following.

Radio station sales forces need to think outside of the ‘radio box’ when selling their value proposition. Increasingly, advertisers are seeing the benefit of ‘marrying’ their brand to a presenter/on air personality and are more easily persuaded to spend money with a station because of the person behind the microphone. This means that the role of the social media influencer in a paid partnership with a brand is just the same played by a radio presenter to endorse/advertise a brand. It is just a different platform and the requirements of the advertiser are the same.

Ultimately, there is no need for a ‘them and us’ approach and the optimal route is for radio and social media to be viewed as an integrated package, for one to be used to amplify the messaging of the other.

An important trend is the evolution of radio into audio and the need for brands and media strategists to plan audio strategies. The listening evolution towards streaming music, podcasting, etc. requires radio stations to embrace these evolving listenership patterns. Digital is making audio sexy again and will prove powerful in directing advertising back into terrestrial radio.

Advertising strategies also need to consider a multi-show approach, rather than supporting single shows as is currently the custom. This approach will allow the different aspects of a brand, product or service that appeal to the varying listenership profiles of the different shows to be highlighted.

Impact on radio talent

The integration of social media with radio creates opportunities for the radio talent to endorse brands on their personal platforms as well. This means that radio presenters are in effect also running their own businesses, requiring their own business models and strategies to plan and think through which campaigns they would like be associated with. It is important to personally support the campaign as authenticity is essential.

Talent management

It needs to be asked whether, if it is not possible for a social media influencer to be a successful presenter, is it still worthwhile to hire the influencer due to the followers

they will bring with them. This is a difficult question as a radio station is a business after all, and needs to attract revenue. However, it must be noted that the number of followers does not necessarily translate into increased listenership figures, or provide the listenership profile attractive to advertisers.

Hiring influencers therefore needs to be a carefully thought out strategy as, while they may not make good presenters, there are other roles where their following could be important, such as contributors to or producers of radio shows. It is a balancing act for today's radio management who cannot go for either those who are just influencers or for those who simply want to be a 'true radio voice'. Today's broadcasters need a combination of both, someone who can perform on radio, as well as use social media effectively. For those considering entering the profession, their ability to utilise the various media platforms available is an important part of the package they bring as a new hire.

Another important consideration in hiring strategies is the need to invest in the "smaller talent", as radio's responsibility is to grow talent if it is to survive as an industry.

How sophisticated are media buyers and radio station sales teams?

Today's media buyer is still tending to buy what they or the client know and enjoy, rather than using a scientific and data-led approach. But it is not always about data and the challenge is for media buyers to use various strategies, depending on the marketing requirements. These strategies may consider audience buy, digital buy or 'marrying' presenters with brands. These presenters may not necessarily bring the largest listenership but their endorsement can be pivotal when launching a new product or brand, for example.

Radio itself has evolved significantly in the sophistication of the promotions and campaigns they run. In the past, promotions were station driven, with brands simply attaching their names to them. Today, brands require campaigns to be built around them and radio stations have delivered, providing innovative/strong content that resonate with the audience. Recognising the importance of a presenter being briefed properly before a campaign, radio stations are accommodating marketers with direct access to the presenters and production teams for such purposes.

Presenters themselves recognise that the onus is on them to fully understand the campaign brief. While data are important, it is a person who places the advertising and the client experience is important when selecting radio for marketing purposes. When taking on an endorsement campaign, the presenter needs to understand what the advertiser wants to accomplish and how they will measure the success of the campaign. Today's radio presenter must also remember that, as an influencer, they represent the entire business both on air and behind the scenes.

Webinar guest questions

How does one get into broadcasting? The relative difficulty to be hired by sending emails with demos was highlighted for two reasons. Firstly, the number of such emails that are received daily by broadcasters and, secondly, radio stations target the type of presenter they need and keep an ongoing look-out to identify young upcoming talent on regional or campus radio stations, for example.

Does a presenter need to keep to the script of an endorsement campaign? Radio presenters have been hired and are successful due to their ability to relate stories, so, once the presenter is fully briefed on the campaign, they are given the freedom to build their own story around it. This is important to be authentic as listeners fast identify when a presenter is faking it.

Concluding comments

Hulisani Ravele emphasised that radio is not dead, nor is it dying. The challenge for radio continues to be how to create something that is memorable, particularly as the rules of the game have changed with the emergence of new media and talent.

Anthony Soglo raised the importance of talent management and giving freedom to the talent to do what they do best. Advertisers need to trust the radio stations' understanding of their audiences and how best to deliver campaigns to their audiences.

John Walls believes that the future of audio is bright and offers many opportunities to advertisers to utilise radio talent for marketing purposes. Presenters need to build their personal brands by involvement in other media platforms, while radio stations must give them even more leeway to be daring, while building their brands on the station's social media platforms.

Martin Bester noted that much of the ongoing success of radio is that it has been fighting its own corner for many years, which has forced it to reinvent itself. With radio boasting the best content and ideas people, it remains a fantastic buy for advertisers, even better than before.