

Behind the scenes with the 5FM 5 Drive Heritage Tour

Planning for a radio road trip is no minor feat. It requires commitment to awesome content, an A-team with solid experience, a deep understanding of what listeners want, innovative tech and the ability to think on your feet - or a set of wheels, as it were.



Image supplied. The 5FM 5 Drive team in Mossel Bay at a desalination plant on the Heritage Tour

The planning for 5FM's 5 Drive Heritage Tour 2022 started around four months before the tyres hit the tar, with the vision of travelling across SA, finding the most amazing people and places that SA has to offer – no matter where they are - and sharing this with the rest of the country, all whilst finding new and innovative ways to push the boundaries of quality radio broadcasting.

Detailed planning

“This wasn't our first rodeo and I'm pretty sure it won't be our last! We like to find things that can't be done... and then do them. It's part of our DNA. “Going into this trip, we had more than 100 outside broadcasts (OB) under our belt, many of them with previous show producer, now programme manager, Michael Bossenger,” says 5 Drive host, Nick Hamman.

“As recently as May 2022, our current producer, Mike Bower, and I went into Zimbabwe and Zambia for Africa Month, with nothing more than a laptop, a sound card, and a set of microphones and it worked beautifully,” he adds.

“It all comes down to planning everything down to the smallest detail, drawing strongly on previous years’ experiences shared by our staff, using every resource at our disposal and making every year’s tour bigger and better than the years before,” says Bower.

He explains that a big part of the planning is how things can go right and how they can push the levels of entertainment and engagement.

“But we also have to think of everything that can go wrong and put a process in place to address it, especially with the omnipresent risk of load shedding and its massive impact on communications networks across SA,” he says.

In one of the towns, for example, the team faced load shedding for three hours, resulting in a very unstable 3G connection.

“We took it in their stride and made a plan - using a set of battery powered connections, ready-packaged content and audio produced on the fly. We put out what ended up being an extremely fun, interesting and engaging radio show,” says Bower.



5FM's Heritage Tour takes radio to listeners

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The Logistics

In terms of staff, gear and tech, the team moves around in a large van, with a Suzuki sponsored chase car as backup, and consists of Nick Hamman, Nadia Romanos on News, Jude van Wyk on Sport and Bibi Mbangula on traffic.

Behind the scenes, Mike Bower is the show’s producer and logistical liaison. Audio Visual editor extraordinaire, Dale Wolf, acts as the team’s film crew.

Each member of the team travels with a laptop, a connected smart phone and set of headphones. The on-air team connects to the 5FM studio in Auckland Park through an external soundcard mixer, which hosts four microphones and five headphone outputs. Signal is sent, via a laptop using a 4G connection - either through Wi-Fi or mobile hotspot - to the studio.

“The system we use is an extremely versatile way of broadcasting. This mobility affords us the ability to go places that no Comrex-based OB van can go,” says Bower.

However, the unique content flow of the show does create logistical factors that need to be ironed out well in advance.

The team has limited time to travel, check into accommodation, capture content, package it and set up for the show. Carefully picking the feature-based audio that needs to be captured is itself a very focused and intensive process.

Being listener centric

The end goal of all of this remains the same: to be unwaveringly listener centric.

While pushing boundaries is their mantra, their main focus remains keeping a hugely diverse set of listeners glued to their radio sets.

“From the person stuck in traffic on the N1 who just wants the hits, the news and traffic like any other day, to the person who would have packed their bags and joined us on the tour, who wants to live it with us, and anyone in between,” says

Bower.

This means anticipating what they want and hitting the sweet spot in terms of balanced content.

The 5 Drive Heritage tour will be running until 30 September, stopping in all nine provinces, with a total of 20 consecutive outside broadcasts. Listeners can follow the tour on-air, online, across all social media channels, as well as via the 5FM App, available for iOS and Android.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>