

Jacaranda FM's Deirdre King; "Radio has been gifted a unique opportunity to reinvent itself"

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Deirdre King, newly appointed MD at Jacaranda FM says it's critical for brands to demonstrate heart and that we ought to surround ourselves or build a team of people who will not allow a virus dictate how they run their business or do their job...

Deirdre King was appointed managing director at Jacaranda FM on 1 May, somewhere in the middle of lockdown, and so started running the station from her dining room table. She comes from Nando's South Africa, where she served as general manager of Brand Experience IMEA (India, Middle East and Africa) and before that acted as head of marketing and communications (Africa) at The Walt Disney Company, so she brings her exemplary experience and a fresh perspective to the station and radio sector.



Deirdre King, MD at Jacaranda FM

Commenting on her experience at Nando's and The Walt Disney Company and how she believes it has equipped her for this new challenge as she embarks into the business of radio, she said it's all about content at the end of the day and that although radio is a medium she hasn't immersed herself in, all of her experience has been about storytelling, which crosses over to radio. "There are very few jobs where your creativity can be brought to life and then shared with thousands of people. It is the ultimate theatre of the mind, giving creatives the unique opportunity to create the impossible using only words, music and sound effects."

Here, she tells us that thanks to Covid-19, radio has been gifted a unique opportunity to reinvent itself and galvanise its communities and that "the companies and people that remain agile, flexible and that are innovating, are the companies and the people that will survive these strange times"...

📌 Congratulations on your appointment. How and when did this come about/take effect? And comment on the timing given the lockdown/global crisis.

What a time to start and what an interesting and challenging time it has been. I never thought when I signed my contract at the beginning of March and Covid-19 was this virus that was only spoken about in terms of Wuhan in China and Italy that I

would not only serve my notice period at Nando's from home but take up the position of MD at Jacaranda FM at the beginning of May, and run a radio station from my dining room table.

And that we would still be here 140 days later and what a 140 days it has been, filled with many highs and some lows, many uncertainties but always the one certainty that yes, we are still at home taking it one day at a time.

This time has taught me a lesson in fluidity, a time where you can only work with what you know as things change so fast.

■ ***Comment on the current state of the industry, how the industry has responded to the crisis and Jacaranda FM in particular, and how you plan to navigate the station through this.***

Radio is in a very exciting place and has been gifted a unique opportunity to reinvent itself. It has a finite time frame to come out of coronavirus with a new and a more loyal audience. It's time for radio to galvanise its communities.

Consumer sentiments are shifting faster and more continuously and adaptive messaging for brands is becoming essential; prioritising the right message, in the right place, to the right person, at the right time. The agility of radio can provide that, not to mention the agile and cost-effective production of the messaging enabling brands to be more proactive and relevant in their messaging. Radio is, therefore, a great companion platform for brands whether to a digital or a TV campaign.

Listening habits have also changed. In general, morning show listening is about the same but workday till 4pm is way up with a distinct rise in podcasts and digital listening.

Radio's role, especially during these uncertain times, is to inform, entertain and provide companionship. With the rise in deep fake news, the need for reliable sources become all the more important. This as evidenced in the increased traffic to our all our platforms.

Entertainment remains really important, although the tonality becomes all the more important with a need for uplifting music.

A station's tone needs to reflect how listeners are feeling and thinking.

It's a time for great collaboration and flexibility. It's a time for great innovation. What I do know is that the companies and people that remain agile, flexible and that are innovating, are the companies and the people that will survive these strange times.

■ ***Why the cross-over to radio, and why Jacaranda FM specifically?***

You don't have to look far to find someone who is predicting the demise of radio, yet when you look at the facts. Radio is still performing very well.

Jacaranda FM has shown consistent growth in audience in every diary since 2018 to date, coupled with an increase in

time spent listening. It's the biggest bilingual broadcaster in South Africa, catering for higher income audiences.

People continue to invite radio into their daily lives because it's easy to consume and readily available across a wide variety of platforms.

Radio is a fun medium and the one medium I haven't immersed myself in. There are very few jobs where your creativity can be brought to life and then shared with thousands of people. It is the ultimate theatre of the mind, giving creatives the unique opportunity of to create the impossible using only words, music and sound effects.

Radio is instant. Where else can you wake up with an idea and see it come to life within a couple of hours? Radio gives you the opportunity of real connections with your community and you have the opportunity of truly making a difference in a listener's life. This as evidenced by the incredible work done by Jacaranda FM through Martin Bester and Good Morning Angels.

How businesses show up at every contact point has long been a passion of mine and the exciting thing about Jacaranda FM is that it is a multi-channel brand that provides the opportunity of an integrated approach to content, exposing over 2 million users per month to content and brand messaging. Jacaranda FM also supports sustainable, responsible initiatives that focus particularly on education and building a better society.

“ It is critical for brands to demonstrate heart and it is our breakfast team that answers prayers and wishes, in authentic and simple ways that makes a massive impact. ”

■ **What is your approach to building and empowering staff?**

I think creating a space of personal growth by its very nature grows a business. It creates a best-in-class team, as they will always be wanting to learn and develop further.

I believe strongly in succession planning and 'leading to redundancy' as this further drives a culture of performance and growth.

I enjoy coaching and mentoring and am not a micro-manager as I believe in an empowered workforce who is not afraid to make mistakes but is solutions-driven.

“ Surround yourself or build a team of people who will not allow a virus dictate how they run their business or do their job. Yes, people are stressed, and stretched and adapting, but attitude is half the battle won. Embrace the changing world, be first adopters, trial new methods and cultivate an attitude that views these changes and restrictions as opportunities. ”

How? Don't fear failure. Our fears have expanded and heightened all at once. Leaders need to trust in their teams and lead their teams to failing fast and learning more for the next round.

■ **How is the station responding to the current crisis created by the coronavirus pandemic?**

How a business shows up at every contact point has long been a passion of mine. Covid-19 and the regulations that came with it forced some businesses like restaurants to sever ties with consumers instantly. Customers could no longer experience the brand like they previously did.

The question is, where are your customers? For businesses, that has been the ever-elusive question. Now we have the answer. More people than ever are at home. How do we provide a new brand experience in their homes? How do we add back that human element physical distancing has taken away?

Jacaranda FM has responded to the needs of their community by providing much-needed relief through Good Morning Angels and the Kagiso Media Relief Fund.

We assisted businesses through our 'Jaca Gives Back' campaign for businesses and advertisers who were struggling to stay afloat during the pandemic, where they could qualify for advertising airtime at no cost, which was aimed at assisting

businesses and advertisers who were struggling to make ends meet.

We developed exciting new products like the Good Morning Angels Benefit Concert, which was the first multi-artist live concert in South Africa, which had a very clear intention: support South Africans through acts of generosity and assistance as well as support artists that have contributed to our culture and zeitgeist. 4,800 tickets were sold, just under 12,000 viewers across the world and over R350,000 was raised.

■ **What do you love most about your career?**

It's always different, always challenging, always learning. I have had the privilege of working with and for top brands both locally and internationally.

■ **What did it take to get to where you are today**

Hard work, curiosity, adaptability, courage.

■ **What's at the top of your to-do list (for work)?**

Learn as much as I can. Meet my team face to face. Inspire and continue to drive a culture of innovation, courage and integrity.

■ **What are you currently reading / watching / listening to?**

Reading:

- *The Ride of a Lifetime* by Robert Iger
- *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms* by Brené Brown

Watching:

- Latest series of *Will & Grace*
- *The Call to Courage* by Brené Brown on Netflix
- Passenger's [Sunday Night Sessions](#) on YouTube

Podcasts:

- [Radiolab](#)
- [Reply All](#)
- [Without Fail](#)

■ **Tell us something about yourself not generally known.**

I developed a range of 100% mineral colour cosmetics. I grow my own veggies.

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