

Why radio remains a content stalwart in 2021

 By [Deirdre King](#)

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After almost 100 years of radio in South Africa, it's only fitting that this 'timer' medium became our companion in the year that needs no restatement.



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The average global growth of radio during the pandemic is reported at 19%, and South African listenership is consistently higher than the global average. Albeit growing, listenership patterns have shifted; for Jacaranda FM the biggest uplift being a little later in the morning and more consistent listening throughout the day.

Life will return to some form of pre-Covid-19 normal once a vaccine is introduced, but radio will emerge as a stronger contender for media spend than any other medium, here's why.

Adapting at the speed of culture

Customer experience and engagement is undergoing a sharp change. Businesses are rediscovering which channels work best for an altered customer journey. At Jacaranda FM we've seen a remarkable increase in personal calls and WhatsApp messages to show producers. Web traffic and streaming are already up by between 25% and 35% respectively, and emotionally engaging features like 'Good Morning Angels' have received more correspondence than ever before.

The audience is very much there and growing, it's just evolving at lightning speed. Marketers trust that radio has the data to direct their efforts to the best programme, in the best format, and for surprising economy; all of that is possible because we constantly mine small data.

Small data

Providing a customer experience that is meaningful and evolves with consumers' digital habits, requires increased attention to data. Whilst big data requires machines to trawl through large data sets, small data is bite-sized enough to be analysed by real people. People who know how to apply those insights.

The type of small data that radio can offer businesses is accessible, informative, and actionable. It's those insights that allow marketers to invest in the consumer experience that suits their needs in a socially distanced world.

Music, news, entertainment, and comedy remain the most popular radio content, but 60% of listeners showed an interest in station webinars (Content Survey 2020). Podcasts have also exploded in popularity, with an estimated 1 in 3 people globally listening to episodes every month. In South Africa, media companies who are looking for ways to diversify their revenue would benefit from exploring podcasts.

Podcasting is an emerging medium in South Africa and Africa at large. It will take a lot of time to build the numbers that justify traditional ad spend on podcasts, but I think it will be a huge component of radio moving forward.

Intimacy at arm's length

As far as radio is concerned, there isn't a home, car, or workplace without the comforting sounds of FM. For some of us, it's the first time we ever heard the news or a narrated 'soap-opera'. A booming voice that seemed like a familiar family member (just funnier and less intrusive) would paint the most vivid characters and scenarios – our imaginations were awakened!

It's the pings and pongs, and swooshes and chimes that signal regular features that influence our lives. Live weather segments remind us to grab that jacket, local traffic helps us navigate our routes, and news provides a credible source to base decisions on. The focus is on the relationship between broadcaster and listener. It's intimate, exclusive, and action-based as listeners are asked to take a specific action.

An advert that addresses customers directly will not only generate greater response rates but will capture the customers who are ready to buy. Radio's intimacy also drives credibility. A 'power spot' that offers a personal endorsement by a radio personality will add credibility to your product or service. Studies show that radio content influences people because they feel they are hearing it from a 'friend' and word-of-mouth remains the greatest sales driver.

More context, better engagement

On the surface, radio is a reach-medium with universal appeal, but because we consume it in and around other activities and habits, we create our own context for messages. Advertising a product or service on the radio has inherent persuasive strengths that subconsciously build trust and purchase intent. Relevant emotional and creative radio ads help consumers to process brand-related information in a way that doesn't feel foreign.

Because of this user-generated context, advert-avoidance for radio is the lowest out of all mediums, it's a stand-out choice for businesses or brands that was to be targeted, but in the most native way for the consumer.

Being on the radio alone won't be enough for you to drive action, consumers are more complex in their communication needs. Advertising on radio is now a multi-channel ecosystem, where businesses can tap into 1st-party data, on-air shows and features, presenter endorsements, social media, boutique events, podcasts (we have upwards of 30K downloads per month), our app, e-commerce, and website.

Free to trust

In the era of fake news, radio is one of the few mediums that has held the trust of the public, dare I say - the pandemic has increased that trust. The consistency and pace of the content available on air put radio well ahead of other mediums.

The free nature of radio will become increasingly important in 2021 as media increasingly monetise through digital subscriptions. It's that free-to-use, portable nature of radio that gives it the ability to perform marketing genius; affordable, repeat-plan content that delivers superior brand penetration and frequency.

Never sleep ecosystem

Radio commercials can be created quickly, with little production time, and usually with a lean team of multi-skilled professionals. It's cheaper to produce than many above the line disciplines.

Copy for live reads and power spots can be produced and revised at short notice. A campaign can be up and running within a week, giving advertisers the agility Covid-19 has demanded. Data-led campaigns that can be turned-around quickly should take a more prominent role in 2021. It's a smarter way to reach people with authentic resonance.

Community Building

Radio communities are so interesting. Listeners are emotionally invested where presenters and on-air talent are concerned. Everyone has their favourite and that's the great diversity that radio provides.

The best example of this that I can share is when 'Good Morning Angels' - a feature we have run for over 21 years, collaborated with Springbok legend Bakkies Botha. Bakkies and Martin Bester used their passion for the Free State to rally the listener community behind the devastated fire-ravaged farmers. Within two weeks, Jacaranda FM listeners raised over R5 million to aid the farmers of the free state. If that doesn't move you, maybe you should buy a billboard.

The future isn't easy to predict, but the last few months have ensured a fundamental shift in our how marketers better connect with customers and deliver what they need when they need it.

ABOUT DEIRDRE KING

Deirdre King is Managing Director of Jacaranda FM King has extensive experience in marketing, communications, business, and content sectors. She has helmed key projects for some of South Africa's biggest brands.

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