

Tessa van Staden: 'Storytelling remains key'

 By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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"Radio remains to be among the most immediate of mediums," said CapeTalk station manager, Tessa van Staden in a recent press release sent to *Bizcommunity*. She explained that talk radio not only reports what is happening but reflects on the impact of developments by airing calls, WhatsApp messages and emails from audience members describing their circumstances, challenges and views.

Van Staden shared that interaction on all their platforms has increased noticeably since they started reporting on Covid-19. "Our audiences want to know more and, at the same time, seem to need to share more."

As part of our April feature on radio and podcasting, we asked her to elaborate on the impact of the coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic on radio and the industry as a whole, and why storytelling remains key.

■ **Elaborate on the impact of the coronavirus/Covid-19 on radio and the industry as a whole?**

At times of crises – like the unusual circumstances we're experiencing as a result of the pandemic – people tune in both for information and companionship. Listenership trends in the UK show a definite hike in listening to talk and news stations in particular. Nielsen says in the United States that 8 in 10 Americans report spending the same or more time on radio as a result of Covid-19 to receive the latest news and information.

The CapeTalk website has seen a 330% year-on-year increase in traffic and the most dominant or most popular articles have all been about the coronavirus. In March the site recorded 1.7 million unique users, making it the most popular of all radio station websites in the country that month. People may be listening at different times than usual as they're working from home, but they're definitely tuning in and even more so.

I think it's been a good reminder to everyone working in radio that we serve an important purpose. It's our jobs to ensure we're keeping our audiences updated throughout while also giving them a platform to share their anxiety, questions and concerns. At the same time, the industry can be a source of inspiration and hope.



“ If you hear about the mom down the road who's sewing masks, or the dad in Khayelitsha who's working from home with his 3-month-old strapped to his back, you feel encouraged... and less alone. ”



Evolving to stay in tune

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■ **In a world of Netflix and Spotify, why do you think radio still has such strong staying power as a mass medium and as a channel for advertising?**

Radio is both immediate and intimate. Listeners have strong bonds with their favourite stations and presenters because

those have been built over time. They trust the medium. We often hear from our listeners, who say they tune in because doing so gives them a sense of what's happening in their city and beyond. Nielsen stats for the USA confirm this sentiment; there 46% of adults are quoted as saying local radio makes them feel connected to their community.

▣ ***What do you think is key for brands to remember when connecting with audiences via audio?***

Storytelling remains key. Humans want to feel connected and wanted to be heard and even more so when they're isolated as a result of the lockdown. Listening is an intimate experience so we need to ensure the audience feels as though they're being spoken to directly. Sometimes we tend to overthink a particular campaign or idea and neglect the storytelling aspect.



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Radio producers and hosts are expected to do more and more on an increasing number of platforms, using different types of technology. Sometimes this informal upskilling happens on the job and on other occasions radio employees are expected to do so on their own, afterhours. Flexibility and a desire to learn are crucial qualities – you won't manage without them. It's not just a matter of preparing for a show and switching on the microphone.

Hosts are doing selfie videos ahead of programmes to pre-promote interviews. Increasingly radio stations are relying on social media and video to expand their reach. LBC in London, for example, is sharing daily FB live videos of radio shows. Everyone in the industry is increasingly thinking of themselves as multimedia practitioners.



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▣ ***List a few things you think the industry can improve on.***

There's room to be more supportive of each other. But what's been encouraging to see is stations across the country collaborating as a result of Covid-19 under the auspices of the National Association of Broadcasters. As an example, when the lockdown period started, all member stations agreed to play the national anthem at noon for several consecutive Fridays to rally everyone together and to show solidarity.



"Turn down your radio" campaign launched by NAB against GBV

15 Apr 2020



▣ ***What do you love most about what you do?***

I love radio. I always have. Talk radio is fulfilling because we can engage with our audience in real-time and give them feedback almost immediately after. That is satisfying. I've always been quite purpose-focused and CapeTalk has an important role to play, particularly in the Mother City, when it comes to reflecting our society, challenging those in power and airing both stimulating and stereotype-shattering conversations.

It's a privilege to work with a team of highly talented, engaged, opinionated and compassionate hosts, producers, technical

producers, online writers and editors who are all dedicated and quirky. I'm lucky to get to work with them and I (usually) don't take it for granted.

■ ***What is next for you? Any exciting plans you can tell us about?***

CapeTalk is always experimenting. Keep an eye on our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#)... watch this space.

Click here to connect with Van Staden on [LinkedIn](#) and you can also visit the Primedia Broadcasting [press office](#) for more news and updates from the CapeTalk team.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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