

MTN's On Air Radio Conference: Growth of digital and radio's lunch money

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Rivonia Boulevard was abuzz on Friday, 17 April 2015, with advertising industry heavyweights and radio legends like Jeremy Mansfield, Andy Rice, Treasure Tshabalala and Jenny Crwys-Williams rubbing shoulders. MTN's second On Air Radio Conference focused on some memorable but also difficult industry conversations, some questioning whether or not terrestrial radio stations were headed towards their demise.

Radio is alive and well

One of the most common themes among media owners and media buyers was that radio, as a medium for both advertisers and audiences, is one of the most viable options. It was clear that stakeholders are committed to the future of radio and that brands are buying into it, which was inspiring because radio is rarely discussed in the age of digital.

In the age of media proliferation, the balancing act between generating the much needed advertising revenue to keep the lights on and creating engaging 30-second ad content, is proving to be hard for some stations. Some of the community radio stations in attendance at the conference maintained how localised and contextual brand content can gain traction on their platforms.

The challenge for both community and commercial radio station teams in creating sponsored content for brands, as it turns out, is the broken telephone between campaigns that are sold to brands and what listeners want. Brands have expectations that media buyers and media owners sell in boardrooms, which tend to be difficult to execute on the airwaves. It was clear that radio production teams felt the need to interface with clients and brands, where they can provide the nuances that make up what their listeners are interested in.

RAMS and perceived inaccuracy

Things got heated and passionate when Gareth Cliff, Founder of Cliff Central; Darren Scott, XVR Ballz and Greg Maloka, MD at KayaFM took to the stage. Gareth Cliff pointed out that RAMS, in his opinion, were a flawed metric for measuring and comparing online radio stations with traditional radio.

Cliff pointed out that on a daily basis, the web allows you to know how many people are listening at a time and download figures of shows provide real-time data that RAMS don't take into account. The discussion then focused on new measurement metrics that could be utilised to rate stations.

The rise of smartphones also provide online radio station owners with more big data about their listeners which is not as readily available on traditional platforms. It turns out that FM band radio stations also learn a lot from about their listeners which, although not in the realm of online data, is helpful to brands for advertising purposes in Africa.

Going forward

The radio industry and media buyers left more aware of the fact that there needs to be bridges from the brand to the presenter of a show. Everyone understands that the business of radio and advertising needs to connect with listeners, as that is what will increase ad revenue for stations on the one hand and make brands more profitable on the other, which will increase the viability of radio as a medium.

There is still an ongoing debate with strong points about whether the demise of radio as we know it will give way to online

stations and whether that is coming to Africa soon. We look forward to following the discussion as it unfolds.

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