

Radio's challenge - Getting young people behind a microphone

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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For young people to enter the radio industry, they need to be given the opportunity to get behind a microphone and build up thousands of hours of live broadcasting, and for that, they need safe environments where they can also fail.



Source: © Iakov Filimonov [123rf](#) For young people to enter radio they need to be given the opportunity to get behind a microphone

This was the feeling of a panel of broadcasters hosted by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) on the penultimate day of Youth Month.

The panelists, Adrian Louw from Bush Radio, Dan Corder from 5FM and Nia Brown from YFM, examined the challenges facing the youth and the opportunities in the country's evolving radio industry.

The discussion was hosted by Ofentse Mboweni, NAB's research and communications specialist.

A small industry

The first challenge is that despite its enormous audience, the country's radio industry is actually very small.

As Corder explains, “Our radio market has many radio stations, but they are divided by language, location, culture, ethnic and cultural interests, and therefore there are actually not a lot of jobs per language group, per area, per region, etc, and this makes getting into radio difficult.”

Despite this, he says the national broadcaster, the SABC, has a good track record of helping young people to enter the industry and is serious about opening the industry and giving young people a platform.



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Young people don't listen to radio

The second challenge is breaking down the myth that young people do not listen to the radio.

“Firstly, data wise that is not true and secondly, if you only going to make radio by old people for old people then you cannot be surprised if young people do not want to listen. You have got to make radio for young people and the best people to do that are young people.”

“If you create radio for young people by young people, young people will listen. If you make it, they will come. It is as simple and straightforward as that,” says Corder.

He adds that the trick is to make it entertaining enough that the older people go that was funny, I could listen to that again. “And that is the real art.

Louw says that the youth is not the future, the youth is active in making those changes now. “Older people should not fear young people. Your station will only benefit from the actual involvement of young people.

“They are part of all levels of the station, not only presenters, their creative and ideas input into the station. I see it as one of our key successes. But it needs to be a merging of experience and the development of the young talent,” he says.

Young people are not engaged

The third challenge is the belief that young people are not engaged.

“A unique problem in talk radio in the country is the belief that young people are not engaged, for example that they do not want to vote,” says Corder.

He maintains that this is not true, “Young people on TikTok comment on current affairs, and they have millions of views.



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Challenge for young people to get on the mic

And then there is the ultimate challenge: getting on the microphone.

“Unfortunately, the only way you can convince anyone in the world to give you their microphone is to show them what you have done on another microphone.

“But radio is high risk - like an aeroplane - because it is live, so no matter how much you do to be risk-averse and future-proof yourself as a manager, the second a microphone is open and someone is talking, they are holding the steering wheel.”

So how much of a flight risk are they? Can you trust them to not burn your brand? Corder says that’s why young people need to do thousands of hours of radio.

“Live radio is very challenging and in that live element there is so much pressure and the only way you can learn to do that is to do thousands of hours on the mic, but the only way to do that is to be given the opportunity to do that in a safe environment where you can screw up.”

Closing of community stations

The last challenge is that while stations such as Bush Radio are paramount to providing safe environments for young people, many community radio stations have closed due to Covid.

“I worry that the closure of many community radio stations is setting our industry back, as is the softening of quality in many campus stations.

“This means that when I look at the radio landscape now, there are fewer places giving opportunities to young people to get on the mic and prove themselves and send it to another broadcaster,” says Corder.

Give young people an opportunity

But stations need to give young people an opportunity. “You are hiring talent and freshness and they can learn the skills, give them a month. That’s where the innovation comes from.”

Louw adds to this. “Age is no guarantee of efficiency and youth is no guarantee of innovation, but if you bring the two together and create platforms where those two can meet, then you are guaranteed success, and growing your market.”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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