

The Eye on truly disruptive digital radio in SA

By  Juanita Pienaar

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Jon Savage and Catherine Grenfell created their own radio "station", borne out of the sheer frustration for commercial radio and its confines. Now in its third year, they are starting to unleash its full potential.

The Eye is proving to be a disrupting force in the media space; to both consumers and brands looking for something relevant and real. Here Savage shares more about the venture, their approach and what sets it apart from the rest.

■ ***Please tell us more about your business and what it is you do.***

Yoh! I always find this question difficult to answer. The simple answer is that we specialise in innovations in broadcasting, content strategy and platform development.

At the heart of our business, we are storytellers who utilise aggressive content strategies in combination with technology to consistently grow and engage audiences in very meaningful ways. This is a potent combination if you are an artist with a powerful story that you want to communicate or whether you are a brand who are trying to communicate in an authentic way.



Jon Savage captured by Clare Louise Thomas.

Now can you imagine what the complicated answer is?

■ ***How did you come up with the name?***

Not only did we just think it was a cool name that people could assign their own meanings to, we also thought it was a provocative statement about the reality that radio is no longer an audio-only medium and that even though we are a radio station at our heart, the technology running the station is not dissimilar to a fully-fledged television station and our ability to turn on video as a stream when we need to means that someday both of these would be indistinguishable.

To be honest, we thought it would be easier to explain in 10 years' time then to explain it now, so we can say "we told you so." ;)

■ ***What approach are you taking with regards to radio and how are you disrupting the industry?***

This is really where I'm very proud of The Eye. I feel that we have spent so much of our three years experimenting with how content is consumed online in this format and not just following the rules of radio, I feel we have been exploring uncharted territory and we have really discovered a hidden treasure road map about how to run digital radio in SA.



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Even global trends don't seem to be totally adaptable in South Africa. So, a genuine understanding of how South Africans

are consuming local content is central to our strategy. Our broadcasting hours are totally unique and have been developed through analytics and testing, our show formats are completely different and how we promote our shows is different too – are shows are **theme-led**, not **presenter-led** (despite the fame of the presenter) as we've seen that this creates a higher engagement rate in social.

We **don't** run like traditional radio at all. And because of this, we have one of the biggest radio dance shows in South Africa, bar **none**!

“ Oh shit. It's that time of the week again...”

1pm. Same time. Same place - <https://t.co/KcmHDhWPJo> pic.twitter.com/yok00rjLu0— The Eye Radio (@thisistheeye) January 26, 2018 ”

We've also started building white-label custom radio stations for some pretty big brands and our insights from The Eye have shaped how we are able to deliver an exceptional service in this area.

■ **Comment on the current state of radio in SA.**

Love/hate.

■ **What does the future of radio look like to you?**

Currently, we are working closely with the companies that are dedicated to providing low cost/free internet access to the whole of South Africa. Until we get our Wi-Fi sorted in these areas, it is a waiting game. I think we are very close now. But this will be a huge game-changer and The Eye has been laying the groundwork for this so that we are ahead of the game when the time comes.

■ **What is The Eye's competitive advantage or core differentiator?**

I think it's not only our passion for telling real South Africa stories and giving a platform to the greatest storytellers, regardless of their social media following, but it's also how we've approached our radio stations content strategy that makes The Eye really stand out.

■ **What obstacles did you have to overcome to launch the venture?**

We are three years in and I'll tell you that every day presents new obstacles. But this is the price you pay for participating in pioneering an industry. There are no rules, there is no infrastructure, there is passion and experimentation and then learning from past mistakes and making things work better. I feel that The Eye is the strongest it's ever been.

■ **What is next on the agenda?**

We've just launched our Johannesburg Eye studio! So, there's that.

Also, one of the biggest issues in the digital radio industry, in my opinion, is that a lot of people try to come up with clever ways to sell to advertisers by using social media reach or other non-measurable metrics rather than use real listenership figures are because they are not huge numbers in the digital space. I work with both my digital stations and also a lot of the huge traditional FM Stations and I can tell you right now, they are having the same problems as digital radio!

“ So everyone is panicking, but these "listenership" figures really hurt the entire industry because they are not real and so brands are not seeing their real return on investment on digital campaigns and are blaming it on "digital radio not working" when the problem is that they were overpromised at the beginning of the equation. ”

Brands need to become educated that you can build extremely loyal and powerful niche audiences in digital radio that you can't do in any other medium.

In traditional, you have a supposed reach of 1,000,000 hearing your car advert. Of those, your conversion rate is extremely low. You end up selling 100 cars.

In digital, you have 10,000 interested and highly engaged listeners who are actively looking for cars. You end up selling 200 cars at a fraction of the cost. This is the power of digital. People aren't catching you on the traffic on the way home, they are **actively** seeking your content and engaging.

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ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

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