

Community radio. Additional value beyond the schedule

By [Candy Dempers](#), issued by [MediaHeads 360](#)

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Home is where the heart is.



It is where people understand you. It is where they hear you and speak your language. Home connects. Home has a sense of realness and the ability to humble you. Home is about the past; it is a place of memories. Home is the starting point of the future; it is the place of a new dawn. It is the legacy of family and the joy of friends. Home is a refuge, a shelter and a place of comfort, it is a meeting place where you have a seat at the table and your opinion matters. As much as home is a physical place, it is also a grounding, and you can feel at home despite being hundreds of kilometres from the front door. Home has a voice; it is driven by the beat of the people, and it walks to the rhythm of music and poetry. It sings and speaks and allows you to sit in silence or to beat your drum. Home is literally on your frequency, and everyone has a home in community radio.

Humble beginnings

Born from the need for free speech, consciousness and to connect like-minded people in a common cause, community radio is the figurative “town hall” in the South African media landscape. As one of the three pillars alongside public and commercial broadcasting, community radio delivers so much more than what you hear on the radio.

The sector was officially recognised post democracy but was a consistent voice in the movement for change in the years leading up to 1994. In the thirty years of community radio, it remains a medium that embodies a humble spirit and approach.

As much as community radio provides a platform for groups with common causes or interests, it is so much more than a voice of a community, community radio is a member of the community, and it intrinsically understands its role in society.

Embracing diversity:

One of the defining features of the community radio sector in South Africa is its ability to embrace diversity. Unlike mainstream media, community radio stations cater to the specific needs and interests of their local audiences. In a country with 11 official languages and a myriad of cultures, this localised approach ensures that content is developed by and

resonates with, the community the station serves.

Community radio plays an important role in disseminating news, information and entertainment in multiple languages, fostering linguistic and cultural expression.

In many ways community radio is the “swiss army knife” in geographically challenged or marginalised communities. There is something for everyone, and everyone has a listening ‘home’. Being a part of the community allows community radio to be a beacon of diversity and inclusivity.

Amplifying local voices:

Community radio provides a unique platform for local voices to be heard, offering a counterbalance to mainstream media that is driven by different imperatives. These stations act as amplifiers for grassroots talent, allowing artists, musicians, and community members to showcase their skills and perspectives. There is no doubt that the sector has helped develop the music and creative economy by taking a chance on creative talent who needed a platform and exposure.

Addressing local issues:

Community radio is uniquely positioned to address hyper-local issues. From social, economic and political challenges that might be overlooked elsewhere because of a larger national agenda, these stations serve as a lifeline for communities, providing a space for discussions on topics that directly impact the lives of their listeners.

Because the radio station is a community member, they see and hear like a vigilant neighbour, and it is these observations that drive the content and programming on the station.

Building community engagement:

Community radio is active citizenry you can hear. Through interactive programming, live call-ins, and on-the-ground events, stations foster a sense of community engagement that transcends the passive consumption of media. As a conduit and facilitator of conversations, community radio becomes a bridge in divided spaces.

Supporting local businesses:

While advertising is a crucial revenue stream for community radio, the impact goes beyond mere commercial transactions. Local businesses often can't afford larger media outlets because of financial scalability, larger media outlets also don't always make sense to small businesses as they are hyper-local and have no relevance to a larger audience. This symbiotic relationship benefits both the businesses and the community and contributes to and stimulates the local economy.

Fostering educational initiatives:

Community radio, as a grassroots medium, also plays a crucial role in education. By collaborating with local schools, educational institutions, and NGOs, these stations become conduits for disseminating information on educational opportunities, career guidance, and skill development programs. This educational outreach not only empowers individuals but also contributes to the overall development of the community and over time can uplift the social fabric of their people.

Bridging the digital divide:

In a world increasingly dominated by digital media, community radio remains a lifeline for those who may be excluded from the digital sphere. South Africa, like many other countries, faces challenges related to the digital divide, where access to the internet and digital platforms is limited in certain regions. Community radio serves as an accessible and inclusive medium, ensuring that even those with limited or costly internet connectivity can stay informed, entertained, and engaged with local affairs. This bridging of the digital divide is particularly significant in rural areas, where community radio stations often serve as the primary source of information.

Nurturing civic participation:

Community radio is a powerful catalyst for civic participation and social cohesion. By providing a platform for community members to express their opinions, discuss civic issues, and participate in local governance, these stations foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among their listeners. An active community is a winning community, and radio is a key driver of this concept.

Sectorial change:

Community radio is a vital contributor to the South African media sector as a catalyst to pluralism and local relevance. The sector has undergone vast change and progress, and they are continually refining their offering and approach to business and investment.

Where clients and brands may previously have ignored community radio in their campaign bookings in favour of regional and national stations, astute planners know and understand when community radio can add exceptional value and relevance. The sector has changed and so should your booking schedule.

Conclusion:

Community radio is about more than being a platform and another listing option. It is about being recognised in your environment and making a difference.

Community radio has got their house in order, when are you coming home?

ABOUT CANDY DEMPERS

Candy Dempers has loved all things media for twenty-three years. A sales and marketing specialist, her first love was radio and bringing brands and platforms together.

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