

Tapping Into the relevance of youth radio

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

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Radio thought leaders have long spoken about the future of youth radio and the increasing pressure that this segment of the medium is under.



It is a conversation that is as old as the concept of a 'mixtape' and like the mixtape, radio still resonates with youth audiences, so how do you tap into it?

Connection and choice

Minenhle Dlamini (managing director, Gagasi FM) loves talking all things youth and youth radio. Her association with Gagasi FM spans more than ten years and she has seen several changes at the station as they have morphed to keep up with the needs of their audience. She says the Gagasi FM listener is more vocal and demanding than ever before and that they are fearless and determined.

Understanding the fabric of your audience is key in connecting with them, and this is one of the reasons Gagasi FM remains an entertainment choice for the youth of KwaZulu-Natal. Dlamini explains that the youth multi-task, they like choice, and they don't stick to one medium. "The key is that they want to connect, and we offer them a one-on-one human experience." It is with this backdrop that the station caters to just under 1,5 million people per week across the province. It's clear from Dlamini's experience that you need to be where the audience is and listen to their needs.

Be authentic

5FM's business manager, JD Mostert echo's the multi-platform approach and 'being real with the audience'. He feels that part of 5FM's latest success lies in the fact that the station is coming from a place of understanding and being authentic with the audience. Mostert says: "This is a generation that will make you famous overnight and cancel you the next day." With this insight, the station has made a concerted effort to sound younger, engage in real, raw, and often difficult conversations with the audience that strikes a nerve. He says that it is also key to let the audience make up their own minds. "Don't prescribe to them and don't assume you know everything, this is a very astute generation who will call you out."

The digital influence

Digital platforms are an inevitable part of the modern media mix, and South African youth radio is online and in the app store as much as they are on air. Gauteng-based YFM led the charge in hooking their audience up with an app and it is a platform that enjoys both content and direct engagement. In listening to YFM, you can hear the drive to digital. The station recently launched Tequila AF, a radio drama that is exclusively available through their app and promoted on their 99.2 frequency. The station says they are very intentional in creating unique content for their digital offering and not repurposing on-air content.

5FM has always enjoyed a vibrant digital presence, being the first South African radio station to hit a million followers on Twitter. The digital space is dynamic and Mostert explains that Instagram and TikTok far outweigh Facebook and Twitter in terms of engagement and interaction with the audience. To this end, the station has created a unique space where creatives can record, experiment and interview guests for the station's digital assets.

Gagasi FM has more than 121,000 downloads of their app and in excess of 84,000 registered users. Dlamini says that audiences want to do more online and that content is a key driver at the station.

Content vs music

Gagasi FM has always had a profound influence on the musical landscape in South Africa and music remains key to the strategy of the station. Dlamini explains that their audience needs have shifted, and there has been a very specific move towards content creation and consumption. "Our audience has told us that they will specifically tune in for our content whereas music used to be the exclusive drawcard. We are catering for this." Gagasi FM runs a dedicated content hub that churns at least six pieces of unique content per day. In the changing consumption landscape Dlamini says: "You need to push beyond the voice and look at other things."

Mostert says that content and music enjoy an amazing synergy on 5FM. The station has always been a music taste maker and music remains a pillar in catering to the needs of the audience. "5FM is a credible music platform, if we play new music on air, our audience is adding it to their playlists." Mostert further says that although it is a tough call to make at times, music still leads the entertainment offering on the station, but content and storytelling are a very close second. 5FM seeks to employ multi-skilled producers who understand that technology is the tool to enable better content creation and connection to audiences.

Brand synergy with youth radio

So how can brands and clients tap into the power of youth audiences?

As the previous head of creative and promotions at Gagasi FM, Dlamini urges brands to listen to the advice of the radio station they are working with. "We understand the audience, we talk to them daily and we get their feedback. Our talent engages with them outside of the station and we know what makes them tick." Dlamini explains that brands should engage the youth in a way they want to be spoken to, the youth appreciate the effort and uniqueness and will reward you with their attention.

5FM's Mostert has a similar sentiment: "Don't tell the audience what they want, ask them what they need." Further to this he says tone is vital and don't hide anything from the audience, they have access to information and will hold you to it.

Dlamini adds that a key mistake brands make is boxing the youth. Understand that today, they are a student living in a township, but know that they have a plan and that their lives are progressing; be a brand that walks to the journey with them.

The latest BRC Rams data on youth radio shows a very stable picture for commercial youth radio in South Africa. These stations are passionate about their audiences, in tune with their needs, speaking to them on the right platforms in a language that resonates and deliver a product that keeps the youth coming back. It seems like an opportune time to enjoy the power of youth radio on air and online; the audience certainly are!

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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