

Covid catapults digital audio

 By [Mark Botha](#)

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Digital adoption globally has been accelerated as a result of Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdowns. With people having scrambled to improve their home connectivity, they are in my view now well set up to engage with more digital platforms than prior to the start of the pandemic.



Mark Botha, head of digital at Mediamark

Tracking metrics also show that people are using multiple devices to engage with media from an audio perspective. SharpStream, a measurement platform that we use for our audio streaming sites, shows that Mediamark's digital audio audiences via mobile phone increased by 9% in the past year alone (November 2020 compared to November 2021). The uptake of home entertainment systems, in the form of smart speakers and TV's, also had a positive increase of 6% (November 2020 compared to November 2021).

These somewhat 'forced' lifestyle changes have shot our listening habits forward by numerous years. A further indication of the accelerated rise of digital adoption is reflected from data by SharpStream and Fabrik which reveals that live streaming of Mediamark's digital audio platforms grew on average by 35% year-on-year (January – November 2020 versus January – November 2021).

Evolution of radio

Digital audio is the evolution of radio and reflects the shift in the way people are tuning in. Part of radio's enduring popularity is that it is both simultaneously intimate, while remaining part of a collective experience, digital audio drives this experience forward. It is accessible across multiple devices and as such plugs into people's lives and is available to listeners no matter where they are, or what they are doing. The array of devices available for people to listen to digital audio will continue to grow, driven by the increase in connectivity as a result of the pandemic.



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According to Statista, just over 60% of the population are reported to be internet users in 2021. While connectivity may be limited by infrastructure and the cost of data, it is worth noting that the South African government wants 80% of the population to have access to the internet by 2024. While it may seem like a lofty goal, it is in keeping with a digitally evolving world, especially taking into account the changes that the pandemic has brought about in terms of remote working.

The increase in internet penetration and uptake of digital audio is starting to grab attention from marketers across the board. It is always important to bear in mind that while radio is a one-to-many platform, digital audio, currently provides a highly targeted one-to-one engagement. On the other end of this engagement is the immediacy of digital and the ability it provides to listeners to engage instantly. Audiences can click on a banner, visit the advertiser's website or to participate in whatever call to action the advert is driving. It is this one-to-one interaction and the ability to encourage immediate action that marketers in South Africa are now starting to take advantage of.

Digital audio on the rise

While Mediamark has seen a significant growth in digital audio advertising revenues since January 2020, not everyone is buying into it just yet. There has been a somewhat slower adoption among some traditional radio media planners. When agencies work in silos there can be a tendency for the digital team to say digital audio falls under radio and for the radio team to say it falls under digital.

Education is key to addressing this and we are continuing to put a lot of energy into exposing planners to the platform through engagements and webinars. Experimentation is also important. Nobody has all the answers, and we are all learning more about this new medium on a day-to-day basis.

As digital advances continue, new online audio formats - including livestreaming, internet radio and on-demand music streaming – are here to stay. The question is: will more brands evolve to embrace new digital opportunities, like digital audio?

ABOUT MARK BOTHA

Having been in the industry for over 15 years, I have also built and managed award-winning teams and have been lucky enough to work with some of the best people in the industry. I am excited about the future of digital and to continuing my work in this exciting medium

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