

# The SABC - 70 Years of broadcasting

 By [Gab Mampone](#)

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There are few mediums other than radio that have done more to advance the concept of the global village over the last 100 years.

From the wireless telegraph invented by the father of radio, Guglielmo Marconi, at the beginning of the 20th century, major technological and scientific developments have today entrenched radio firmly in the space age, with extraterrestrial satellite transmissions, Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB), Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM), web casting, as well as broadcasting to visual radio instead of traditional FM (Frequency Modulation) broadcasting.

## ***Historical firsts and the origins of the SABC***

From the first use of military wireless in the world by the army of the Transvaal Republic in the Anglo-Boer War in the 1900s, radio was revealed for the first time to the general public at the Great Empire Exhibition in 1922.

The country's first radio station, 'JB Calling', began broadcasting in Johannesburg on the 1st of July 1924, followed by a second Cape Town-based station in 1924 and another in Durban in the same year. These three stations later combined to form the African Broadcasting Corporation on the 1st of April 1927.

In 1936, the African Broadcasting Company was dissolved and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was established by an Act of Parliament as the new public service broadcaster which in 2006, will proudly celebrate 70 years in broadcasting.

## ***Stations across the nation***

In the early 1940s the first direct transmissions in African languages were made by telephone line and by the early 1950s, Springbok Radio - the country's first commercial radio station - ushered in a new age of radio entertainment with its shows, dramas and comedies. The 1960s saw new regional radio stations in the Cape and Natal, while Radio RSA started broadcasting as an official world service.

In the mid 1970s, the SABC took over Mozambique-based LM Radio, relaunching it as Radio 5 and later as 5fm. As a response to several non-SABC stations based in the so-called 'independent' homelands, Radio Metro - which later became Metro fm - was launched as a commercial music-oriented radio station catering for the progressive Black middle classes of the 1980s. Three language-based radio stations - isiSwazi, isiNdebele and Indian speaking - were also established in the

same decade.

To replace the original English and Afrikaans as well as Springbok Radio, at midnight on the 31st of December 1985, Radio South Africa (now called SAfm), Radio Suid Afrika (now RSG), Radio 2000 as well as three new regional stations in Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth took to the air.

### ***Adapting for the new millennium***

As the state broadcaster, the SABC was created with a monopoly on the provision of broadcasting services that emphasised racial and ethnic divisions under the previous regime. The IBA Act ended the broadcasting system monopoly, opening up radio and television markets to competition. It transformed the state broadcaster into a public broadcaster, and made possible the introduction of community radio for the first time. The new democratic government led by the African National Congress (ANC) has freed the airwaves by restructuring the state broadcasting monopoly with a broadcasting dispensation that meets the needs of all South Africans, offering a choice of services and content ownership.

The early 1990s saw a major restructuring of the SABC as a national broadcaster. The corporation's radio and television portfolios were completely revamped, and it started to explore satellite transmission and opening the airwaves to other broadcasters.

The Radio Data System (RDS) on FM services was launched in 1992 and in 1995, the SABC launched the transponder spaces on the PAS-4 satellite, making its services available nationally to people who had satellite receiving equipment.

The SABC sold its six regional radio stations to private enterprise and re-launched its radio portfolio in September 1996, when Radio RSA was also rebranded as Channel Africa. The first community radio stations came on stream in 1995 and the first private independent radio station in 1997.

In the 21st century and beyond the door to 'micro radio' is opening, which could lead to the birth of many low power radio stations, operated by individuals, neighbourhood groups or community organisations for example.

### ***The SABC today...***

SABC radio is divided into Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) and Public Commercial Services (PCS). The PBS is represented by nine indigenous South African language radio stations, with the Khoi and San languages also represented under this portfolio via the X-K FM station, as well as English and Afrikaans. SABC 1 and SABC 2 respectively fall within the PBS portfolio of television stations catering for the aforementioned markets.

Built on a global perspective of economics, social and political infotainment, PCS stations provide entertainment and sports broadcasts as well as a mix of up-to-date urban contemporary and information to their target markets - the young, urban adults. The SABC 3 television station which falls within the PCS portfolio provides a similar service.

### ***... and tomorrow.***

Currently reaching 90% of South Africa, radio is the leading medium and primary source of information for many people as it reaches every part of the country - rural, urban, metropolitan, small towns and villages.

Deregulation has led to increasing competition in the market. Currently, there are 18 SABC radio stations, six greenfield radio stations, nine independent radio stations and more than 60 community radio stations competing for the same market with five television stations, over 500 magazines and more than 100 newspapers.

With two new television stations and more than eight radio stations more likely to be operating before 2008, the SABC remains committed to delivering exclusive programming mandated by ICASA. This consists of children's programmes, documentaries, live sports, the opening of parliament, education, indigenous languages including Afrikaans, current affairs,

drama, disability programmes, youth programmes, and those that uphold culture.

New commercial radio licenses will also have an impact on the current commercial radio stations as there is only so much available market to target, forcing the programming format to be focused on specific programme genres for example such as youth, jazz music, and R&B music.

Depending on the number of FM frequencies available this might create an opportunity for satellite radio that has seen listening to radio via television in the United Kingdom (UK), increasing to levels of 35%. This creates an opportunity for radio to utilise television as a marketing platform.

## ABOUT GAB MAMPONE

A graduate of Wits University where he obtained a BA(Hons) in International relations as well as two post graduate qualifications from Wits Business School, Gab Mampone is a member of both the International Forum and the Institute of Marketing Management. He holds an MBA from De Montfort University, having authored a dissertation on "The factors influencing the decline of radio advertising expenditure and an in-depth analysis of radio advertising within the South African context". He has also completed courses at the Institute of Marketing Management, the Gordon Institute of Business Science. He is also a qualified and practicing Chartered Marketer. As the General Manager of Radio Sales at the SABC with a staff complement of more than 170 people, his duties cover a range of responsibilities over nineteen 19 SABC radio stations. These include effective implementation of marketing, pricing and revenue strategies; providing strategic leadership in managing and providing solutions relevant to SABC Radio Sales; marketing and developing short, medium and long term competitive strategies as well as expanding and maintaining key markets. The strategic vision is to synergize and integrate all SABC revenue generating platforms to achieve optimal commercial returns in a hugely competitive environment. In addition to his other responsibilities in 1999, Gab Mampone was appointed as an Audit Committee member of the Government Communications and Information Service and is also involved in the IVC and MDDA Audit Committees.

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