

The continued relevance of radio in uncertain times

 By [Boni Mchunu](#)

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Radio has always proved to be a medium that adapts easily to crisis situations, and it has not been more evident than in the past year when Covid-19 caused disruptions in just about every sector. However, the pandemic is not the first major obstacle for radio, as the rise of digital painted a grim picture for the future of traditional media.



Source: pixabay.com

Yes, traditional media outlets, particularly in the print magazine sector, have taken a knock, with many long standing brands closing their doors or moving solely to digital. Adapt or die, experts warned. But is radio, which celebrated its 100-year anniversary in 2020, dead?

It is a question that has been asked many times over the years.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that the role of the media continues to be as vital in society today as it was 100 years ago.

Now more than ever, media has become as essential as our daily needs. It is my view that the media of today is playing an important role in creating and shaping public opinion and strengthening of different societies.

Media acts as a watchdog to protect public interest against malpractice, as well as creating public awareness of all important societal matters. Bringing it home, in the current crisis caused by Covid-19, radio has again stood out as being an essential and reliable medium to stay informed, according to a study by Rodero (2020).

The results indicate that radio is the medium that scores highest for its reliability, credibility, and treatment of information about the pandemic.

Radio during a crisis

Throughout history, at times of major natural disasters and health emergencies, radio has played a leading role thanks to the fact that it is universal, instant, and accessible.

This central role of radio is also seen in the number of initiatives that different stations around the world have organised, such as competitions and acts of solidarity to help all those affected by Covid-19, namely the Kagiso Media Hunger Relief.



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Radio continues to be the number one source of credible and reliable information throughout the pandemic. During the peak of Covid-19, our listenership soared. Time spent listening grew tremendously from an average of two hours to six hours and above. (East Coast Radio listener survey: April 2020).

Listeners were at home and had more time to listen to radio on different platforms, making the holistic approach to radio in the 21st century even more important. Whether listeners tuned in traditionally or via digital, the impact is plain to see.

Innovation, agility, and partnership

The negative impact of Covid-19 was felt by all sectors, including radio – which felt the pinch as a result of businesses cutting back on advertising spend. The secret to staying above water during the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be innovation, agility, partnership, and valuing our partners now more than ever.

If our partners win, we win too. These are unprecedented times and therefore, as a business, we are continuously adapting and evolving to ensure that we are constantly ahead of the pack. Importantly, our mission is to assist businesses in KZN rebuild post Covid-19.

Strategic thinking during a crisis

Strategy is the corner stone for every business, but it is only as strong as the people implementing it.

Baseline forecasts of revenue and costs are tough, and who knows whether a third wave or a vaccine will change everything. The only thing we can be certain of is that the right people for the job have the ability to take the brand forward.

Yet decisions must be made. The strategic planning process' greatest value may be in identifying uncertainties and options even more than laying out a fixed path for the future, because the future is unknown.

The basis of any successful business will always be about maintaining, sustaining, and growing your market share. Where revenues are tight, market share becomes even more important. This takes a deliberate approach, so at ECR we make sure that we are client-centric now more than ever. We are there for our customers to partner with them on this journey of recovery. We are evolving our product to suit their needs and adapting to the forever evolving market environment.

Adapt or die? Radio is constantly adapting

At the beginning of lockdown, we needed to adapt our programming to suit the listening patterns of our listeners. We realised that since people were working from home, they started listening to radio later than normal. With speed, we changed our prime-time programmes to suit the new listening patterns, which was hugely successful because our audience was able to listen for longer. This resulted in seeing a listener increase of about 62%, which was phenomenal. So, advertising messages were on air for longer. (East Coast Radio consumer survey: May 2020).

Importantly, this pandemic has expedited the need to digitise our business system to enable us to optimally function remotely. The team has been able to do so exceptionally, and I will forever be grateful to have a team that has been able to gear up and ensure that the business functions efficiently despite the changes.

The importance of united leadership

Covid-19 has emphasised the importance of effective leadership. Now more than ever, leadership teams must embody the force of the multiplier concept to take their businesses forward.

Covid-19 has taught leadership life lessons, especially that nothing under the sun is constant. As leaders, we need to be forever ready and make sure that we have systems in place that can carry our businesses in change.

Lastly, Covid-19 has taught the importance of families (work family and home family). We have had to be closer in order to be stronger together. As the saying goes, what does not break you makes you stronger. All leaders will emerge stronger after this pandemic, because this too shall pass.

ABOUT BONI MCHUNU

Boni Mchunu has been at the helm of East Coast Radio since 2015 and leads the team at KZN's number one hit music station with inspiration. Born and raised in Pietermaritzburg, she is passionate about KwaZulu-Natal and is proud of ECR's standing amongst the people of the province...

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