

The serious side of Smile 90.4FM with The Honest Truth

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

28 Sep 2017

September is the month of Spring and renewal in the Southern hemisphere. That's why it's a popular month for innovation in the media. Smile 90.4FM is doing just that with a new late-night talk show called *The Honest Truth*. True to the fact that volatile and challenging topics can't be avoided, the show serves as a counter balance to the station's generally positive workday programming...

If you tuned in to Smile FM between 8pm and 10pm on Monday to Thursday evenings this month, you may have thought your dial was faulty. While you'd hear the velvety, reassuring voice of radio personality Benito Vergotine – with the station from the start – he's clearly shifted from his afternoon slot to a position that's darker in a number of ways – from time of day to the topics tackled on the new show, not the standard bucket of sunshine we've come to expect from the station.

In fact, *The Honest Truth* purposely tackles uncomfortable and controversial issues. For example, the very first broadcast of the show investigated media's responsibility in conveying the honest truth discuss the fine line between brutal honesty and sensationalism. Guests included Lance Witten, deputy editor of *The Argus* Digital; Andrew Koopman, editor of *Die Kaapse Son*; Marelize Potgieter, journalist at *Huisgenoot*; and Andre, the Big Positive Guy.



Wessels and Vergotine.

Show producer Christine Wessels has also been with Smile since its 'on air' button was first lit, and is looking forward to the in-depth conversations about fears and hopes for the country and community that can be had after 8pm, when the dishes are done and the kids have been put into bed. She holds the words of author Ben Tauplin dear when thinking of the new venture:

“ Night air, good conversation, and a sky full of stars can heal almost any wound. ”

Here, Wessels, presenter-turned-talk show anchor Vergotine and programme director Clive Ridgway share their input on creating a show like this and the artistry great talk show anchors have in drawing the listener into the conversation...

■ **Benito, talk us through your career highlights and any details your listeners may be surprised to hear about you.**

I started out in radio many years ago doing the graveyard, 3am, shift on Kfm. I was thrilled to be on radio. From there, I moved to the early evenings; progression from there included hosting the mid-morning and midday shows before a move to weekend afternoons. I was part of the Kfm team for more than 12 years. At that time, I felt I could benefit from a new challenge.

I was very fortunate to be included in the Smile 90.4FM team. I was excited to be part of a brand new radio station without any historical presence. That was an exciting challenge. Since our launch, we've grown steadily offering listeners not only great music, but also a chance to see things around us in a new light – in a positive, productive light.

From 4 September I've taken on yet another challenge in hosting a talk show. This is a first for me as I've only worked on music shows during my time on radio so far! The new talk show gives us an opportunity to expand on stories we touch on during the day, and is a way of also addressing the aspects which affects our lives in a mindful manner.

There've been many career highlights over the years, so it's almost impossible to recall at the drop of a hat; but what continues to stand out are the chats I was afforded with some incredible people – artists, captains of industry and our local talent. Personally, a big highlight is the birth of my twin daughters. Unfortunately, my wife passed away last year, but I am continually strengthened by my loving daughters.

■ **Christine, your turn – share your role as show producer, including the challenges and unique happy moments.**

My role as producer is to keep an ear on the ground, to listen to what our Smile 90.4FM listeners are talking about, what my neighbours are worried about and what makes my friends and family **smile**! These are the topics we'd like to discuss on *The Honest Truth* with Benito Vergotine. The aim is to create a platform where listeners have the chance to discuss various topics with experts in studio. We are also very aware of the power that we have to motivate, inspire and create movement where needed.

■ **What's the appeal of a radio talk show over the average music show?**

The average music show apportioned nine minutes in an hour to ads, and perhaps only half of that time to presenter talk. The strongest messages communicated on the average music show have to do with selling the station's brand positioning. Space for storytelling, discussion and serious communication is hard to come by within the contemporary super-tight commercial music format. Adding a talk show at the right time of night opens up a window for authentic and substantial engagement with studio guests and the listener.

■ **Looking to the new show itself, share the premise of what it offers listeners and advertisers alike and how this stands out from your usual powerfully positive angle.**

The Honest Truth gives us an opportunity to do what we cannot during the highly commercial drive time and workday hours – namely, talk to the listener in a more reflective manner. Tackling topics of interest and importance to Cape Town will make up the bulk of our content on this show. Our audience consists of well educated, higher income, family orientated Capetonians who are interested in what's going on in town, in our country and in the world. We'll be able to dedicate the airtime we need to thoroughly sink our teeth into topical and relatable content and produce genuine food for thought.

Engagement with the listener during prime daytime channels is always short-form. Listeners participate as game contestants or text through comments that seldom run longer than thirty to ninety seconds, depending on the tightness of the format. Our new show will allow time for properly sketching context, reflecting on alternatives, dissecting and analysing.

Advertisers wishing to position their brands with programming of a more substantial nature will have *The Honest Truth* as a platform for their messaging.

■ **Sounds like an excellent addition. How does a new show like this innovate the medium – what else can broadcasters do to ensure they remain relevant in this time of digital streaming?**

Our programming approach is to do what radio does best – to connect powerfully with the listener using sound, words, ideas and emotions. The great differentiator in the digital age will be reliability. Communication conduits may shift, but people will stay with journalists, broadcasters, bloggers, personalities and brands they trust and get value from.

The Smile brand is built on the simple understanding that what we think affects how we feel, how we feel affects what we do and what we do affects who we become. We're building a credible, reliable and trusted brand through broadcasting content that is always honest, balanced, consistent and authentic. Our purpose is to inspire and promote optimism. We seem to be getting this right as our listenership continues to grow.

That's something to smile about and inspiration to keep innovating. Click through to the [Smile 90.4 FM press office](#) or follow their [Twitter stream](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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