

Where is the next radio talent coming from?



By [Gavin Meiring](#)

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Having been in the radio industry for over 25 years, I have always heard concern from people in the industry who ask where tomorrow's talent is coming from.

Over the years in South Africa we have had many radio icons from Alex Jay, Kevin Savage and John Berks to the current icons like Gareth Cliff, John Robbie and DJ Fresh. However, there is a distinct opinion that these or similar talents may not surface again. The radio market has become a battlefield for sales targets and marketing promotions along with the competitiveness within the congested radio space. As such, programme managers focus the bulk of their attention on driving sales and promotions, the morning and afternoon drive shows and have little time if any, to develop and coach new or existing potential radio talent.

Growing and bringing new talent

The key focus for the radio industry should be to grow and bring in new talent that both challenges the existing talent pool on prime radio shows, as well as improve and set benchmarks for how radio content can be more engaging and compelling.

It must be remembered that in radio, Talent is the star, Music and Format was never the star they're merely elements of programming as is other elements like News and Sports. It takes a real-life exciting, compelling talent that enables a personality to stay organised within these elements, keeping listeners attracted to the radio station.

So, to pose the question of where the next radio talent is coming from, the industry should address how new talent is being recruited to radio stations and what is being done with real talent development that exist within its training structure.

Talent development at most radio stations is typically done through the programming department and is mainly the responsibility of the programme manager. This consists of a series of scheduled airchecks and show assessments and new recruited talent gets placed in a 'training slot' in the middle of the night to gain on-air experience.

These training slots are useful, but it must be considered that often the talent is then generally left to their own devices with limited commercial knowledge, only to be then told what they are doing wrong when the aircheck happens.

Four major flaws

Four major flaws in radio station talent development are:

1. Existing talent that needs to be developed are generally left to learn on-air, exposing listeners to often inferior and potentially switch-off content but more importantly, early detection of very simple techniques are not immediately addressed and corrected.
2. Priorities and time pressures keep the programme managers from focusing on talent development and this is still the story of practically every broadcast group and individual station in South Africa.
3. The industry has never had a true radio development system. The closest we have come over the years has been to look at community or in-house radio stations as feeder talent or simply to look at taking talent from other markets.
4. Most radio DJs are independent contractors which means that the radio stations are reluctant to embark on 'formal' radio training as this would deem the independent contractors to be permanent employers with a different set of rules that need to be applied as per the labour Relations Act.

A need for better structure

However, there appears to be a need for better structure and a plan for each and every presenter that is reviewed along with their training and development plan.

This should include regular development meetings, not just air checks, where progress and other development plans pertaining to what they can do off air can be discussed.

Six steps to develop good talent into great talent

1. **Who is the personality?** This requires a personality evaluation to determine what attributes the personality has that competitors and other talent do not have. Hone on these strengths and make them a powerful USP that would be hard to replicate in the market.
2. **Know what makes you famous** What do you want your talent to be famous for? What is it that the talent does that they are known for/spoken about? These are the attributes that allow the talent to develop in a way that is easily identifiable e.g. as the 'Guy that upsets politicians' or the 'Girl that says it like it is'. Radio stations should build the show and market the personality around that. This must be the key factor around the show design and construct.
3. **Making sure all content selection has surprise impacts** This requires that the content used on the show always has an angle that no one else has ever thought of. If the press and popular opinion on a topic is one particular way, what are the other possibilities that have been overlooked? What would surprise the listener in such a way that would make them say "Hey I never thought of that!" Surprise is always the best content element.
4. **Know your peeps** Always have a fresh look at the target audience and devise an audience growth plan that has real set targets and demographic objectives. All content must be filtered to appeal to the desired targeted market.

A good exercise is to identify a family member or friend who is the typical targeted listener then ask the question whether they would relate, laugh, cry or find it appealing.

5. **Be a social media tart** Radio Jocks can no longer rely purely on their radio medium to grow, build loyalty or engage with their audience. There needs to be a constant stream of social media integrated into their shows using all available social media platforms.

Typically Twitter is best and easiest to engage whilst on-air and Facebook with links to Instagram and YouTube done off air. However, all can be run simultaneously as well, and sometimes it's best that this is managed by the talent personally. Top international and SA celebrities that make their own postings are more popular.

6. **All round media talent** It is absolutely important that a radio talent is not only a radio personality and needs to be developed to have skills in other media or entertainment platforms. The biggest radio stars are the ones that also are club DJs, TV stars, actors, public speakers, MCs or social commentators. It allows them the external exposure to drive

their personalities and make them more accessible to their audience.

ABOUT GAVIN MEIRING

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