

Time to rethink Kenyan radio

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Let's be honest, the glory days of Kenyan radio are behind us. What we have now is pure experimenting based on research and market forces. Segmentation is the in thing today.

The market has been segmented into tiny parts based on sex, age, tribe and social status. Of course there are many other segments but these are some of the main ones.

This segmentation is the reason you have many stations playing almost exclusively one genre of music. This, if you ask those in the know, is because it helps in direct marketing since the audience you attract is the target audience that the corporate client wants to reach.

But there is a problem; it does not seem to be working. Only a handful radio stations are making money despite every station with an FM tag on it trying to carve their own niche.

Look at Metro FM. It used to play exclusively reggae, one of the most popular genres of music the world over. But it stopped playing reggae after it emerged to be a loss making venture and they are about to try something different under a different name.

From this week, Metro becomes Venus FM and will be targeting exclusively women. Now, here's the thing; it is not that reggae has no audience or it only appeals to those in the lower-income bracket. No, music is just but one aspect in the whole sphere.

Segmentation will not work if your presenters are weak. Let's just get that out there. You can play reggae or riddims like Uptown radio but you will still not appeal to the people who love and listen to that kind of music.

You see, ask those in the know, corporates do not want a spot on radio any more, they want engagement. Someone who will yap about their products on their show and get the audience to interact with the brand or product.

Now, that is not about the music, it is about your presenters. If they cannot do it, it does not matter whether you present porn; people will still not listen to you. Metro and these other stations can rebrand all they want. If they don't have presenters who can engage the audience, they are not helping their cause.

I have a strong feeling that Kenyan radio needs to go back circa 1998-2002 when everyone played on a level field and what mattered was how you engaged and appealed to your audience.

Morning Breakfast radio played Soul and other classics mostly targeted to the mature audiences going to work. After that, they would go young since that is the time most young people probably got up or started their activities if they weren't at school.

Afternoons were a joy on radio for those who loved hip hop and as the mature audiences left work for their homes, the music would change and get more mature before going all sentimental at night when lovers expressed their undying love on radio.

I believe that format needs to be returned and of course well managed with better presenters who talk sense and not sex.

If you look at the people who used to be on radio back then, you will realise they have largely stayed true to that era. Maina Kageni, Caroline Mutoko, Cess Mutungi, Bill Odidi and the rest.

These newbies who have no content are the ones killing radio. That brief moment between songs is what is making me, as a listener, switch off.

Source: allAfrica.com

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