

Smile 90.4FM Cape Town's Good News Network

By [Clive Ridgway](#), issued by [Smile 90.4FM](#)

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The power of radio lies in its ability to affect how the listener feels.



Smile 90.4FM was created with the deliberate intention of putting smiles on the faces of the people of the Mother City.

While other stations may lay claim to this very same dynamic, Smile 90.4FM is the only one deliberately carrying it through to the most time-worn of radio's elements, the news product.



The notion of highlighting news that is overtly positive and delivering it with empathy, remains alien in mainstream radio circles. And tampering with the definition of what is news, is tantamount to letting your freak flag fly high.

In the radio world news consists of three minutes of compressed local, national and international information purportedly presented in an unbiased manner at the top of each hour. The news jingle signals the separation of news from other more incidental content, priming the listener to expect that what follows is vital information. This translates into a reality that routinely exposes the consumer to vast amounts of negative information, disasters, racial atrocities, criminal activities and a ton of other horrible things that may be very far removed from the consumer's everyday life.

We are supposed to believe that keeping up with the news is important and of value, yet there is no evidence to support the rationale that placing the worst of humanity as item number one in a news bulletin, has changed the world for the better.

On the contrary, it is widely accepted these days that the news contributes significantly to increased levels of anxiety and depression. Presenting information that generates fear and worry without balancing context, or suggesting solutions, cannot be morally justified. Yet, focusing on news that comes from the more admirable side of humanity is considered soft news or not news at all.

Convincing news people that they might be clinging to a relic of a dead era is not an easy job, but it is a necessary one. A decision to do just that was taken at Smile 90.4FM and the news product was changed as follows:

- All news bulletins were required to open and close with a positive story.
- All news content was to be aligned with the Smile 90.4FM brand values – optimism, community, empathy, family.
- All information coming to the station from traditional news providers, wires, services and social media was required to be critically questioned and evaluated before being written up and taken to air.
- Journalists were instructed to avoid silver lining reporting.
- Wording, tone, pace, cadence and timbre of presentation was to be managed with mindfulness so that all messaging

would adhere to the station's positive values.

- The positioning line, "Amplifying the good news in the Mother City", was introduced to clearly convey the core message of the Smile news philosophy and prevent journalists, anchors and reporters from falling back into the traditional negative news cycle.

The decision to innovate was not taken lightly. A great deal of thought went into understanding the psychology of audio messaging and the effects excessive negative information has on evolving multi-cultural communities in transforming markets.

Headlines that create anxiety diminish capacity for transformation.

Evidence gathered confirmed that shock tactics employed to gain attention without consideration of how it makes the listener feel, were actually not as powerful as traditionally assumed. Evidence points towards the reverse being true.

Social media analytics tell us that good news spreads faster than bad news. Statistics indicate that good things get more shares than bad things. Stories that inspire and create a feeling of awe, gratitude and optimism make people open to sharing, caring and connecting.

Psychologists and neuroscientists agree with news sensationalists that listeners react profoundly to audio that arouses on a primal level. But as a corollary to this we see that people prefer positive to negative arousal. "Buzzworthy" no longer means "shocking", "threatening", "frightening", "abrasive" or "crude". People prefer to talk about and share information that is life-affirming and news that excites us.

Smile 90.4FM's innovative news policy has been well received by listeners.

Facebook message from a typical Smile listener...

THANK YOU! For "Amplifying the good news in the Mother City"

With all the bad things happening in this world, it's good to have the news put a *SMILE* on your face on a daily basis 😊 Even if it is something a bit negative, your news presenters wording is so good that it doesn't sound as harsh or violent as people expect 😊

The radio consumer trusts the station of their choice to bring them the freshest information that is factually accurate, topical and relevant. Listeners come to Smile 90.4FM specifically for the way it makes them feel. There is no justification for our news not adhering to the same feelgood and inspirational goals as the rest of our programming content – as long as it is factually accurate, topical and relevant.

On Monday, 12 March, The Smile Good News Network will be launched. It will add the power of digital/social to the Smile media mix carrying the station's best positive news stories and the latest trending news. Listeners will be encouraged to join a mailing service and receive notice of the most popular stories the Smile Good News Network carries each day. The Smile Good News Network will run through the Smile 90.4FM website. Content will consist of short stories about the most inspiring and noteworthy people, businesses, events and initiatives.

Smile 90.4FM is still a baby in the Cape Town radio market turning just five years old on 25 March. The station has experienced healthy growth over the years. Listenership currently stands at 169,000 upper LSM, sandwich generation influencers. Over the last twelve months listenership has grown by 36%. (BRC Ram February 2018).

While it cannot be stated with certainty that amplifying the good news in the Mother City has driven Smile 90.4FM's steady growth, the differentiation of our news product certainly offers Capetonians a more optimistic, solutions driven and humane perspective on life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olive Ridgway is programme director at Smile 90.4FM 082 319 4500.

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Smile 90.4FM

Smile 90.4FM is a bilingual radio station that offers entertainment, information and inspiration to the upper LSM Metropolitan audience of Cape Town.

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