

# 2014's mad media mix

 By Charlie Wannell

27 Mar 2015

Looking back on 2014, it's clear that we are living in an era of converged media where the consumer has a voice, content lives on dozens of scattered platforms, and traditional media is having to move at a lightning pace to keep their audiences engaged.

The media landscape in South Africa has also never been more vibrant, inclusive and exciting than ever before. Print is struggling but surviving; OOH and outdoor is becoming more accountable; radio, especially regional and community radio is booming; and new players promise to change TV engagement for the better.

And of course, digital is giving people access to content wherever they go - not just professionally produced content but also information created by everyday people. Here are a few of the trends and events that shaped the media landscape in 2014.

## Old media circus, social media storm

Two murder trials captured the attention of the South African public last year - Oscar Pistorious and Shrien Dewani. We saw both drive a huge amount of traffic for digital video - a trend that is sure to accelerate in the years to come as bandwidth gets ever faster and cheaper. And significantly, South Africans relied as heavily on social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook for the latest breaking news as they did on broadcast and print.

## Activism from the grassroots

From the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge to Movember, we're seeing social media users rally with each other, celebrities, and in some cases, brands to fight for worthy causes. Though cynics may write these efforts off as slacktivism, they are definitely helping to raise funds and awareness. Community isn't just in the real world any more - it's to be found in the digital landscape, too.

## Accountable authority

Jacob Zuma was in the news for all the wrong reasons last year. None of his statements about misspending on his Nkandla homestead have satisfied the public, and his reliance on an old school spin doctor to frame his narrative seems out of touch in today's world. Contrast him to the transparency of his nemesis Thuli Madonsela, our fearless public protector.

She's an active Twitter user, who often uses her tweets to explain the workings of her office to the public. Madonsela is not only a national hero, but someone who understands that in this era of social media, people in power should be making themselves accountable to those they serve.

## Digital radio gets real

Is Gareth Cliff crazy? Many people suspected that the shock jock had lost his mind when he traded his 5fm gig in and set up a digital radio platform of his own at cliffcentral.com. It's a gutsy move and it may take years to pay off, but Cliff has positioned himself right at the forefront of the digital radio revolution.

Though digital radio is still in its infancy in South Africa, Cliff must enjoy the creative control he has and the freedom from onerous licensing conditions. If anyone has the personal brand to make digital radio fly, it's him. Everyone else in broadcasting is watching with great interest.

## Consumer power

Empowered by social media as well as more robust consumer laws (the Consumer Protection Act, for example), local consumers are now standing up to big companies that could once walk over them with impunity. Cell C's dispute with a disgruntled customer who put up a banner bemoaning its bad service on Beyers Naude Drive is a case in point.

Most brands seem dazed and confused by the vigorous opposition they're getting from customers for bad service. It's more important than ever to listen, respond and be authentic in their communications with customers.

These themes are driving a lot of change during 2015 in the media industry. One thing is for sure, those brands that aren't showing audience engagement innovation will be left in the dust.

### ABOUT CHARLIE WANNELL

A stint outside the advertising world saw Charlie own her own "Scrapbooking" business. But the excitement of advertising and radio continued to call and she returned to Radmark in 2010 as Marketing Manager. Her most current challenge was to assist in redefining a mature radio business to a more future-oriented multi-channel organisation called Mediemark - specialising in radio as well as digital with a view to other media areas.

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