

Evolving to stay in tune

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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With the Radio Awards 2020 taking place later this week, I interviewed Taryn Westoby, head of Arena Events, who has managed the Awards since their inception in 2010, on the key developments over the years and what she's most looking forward to regarding this year's Awards specifically. But first and perhaps most importantly the state of radio particularly at this time.



Taryn Westoby, head of Arena Events

■ ***Comment on the current state of the radio/podcast industry.***

It's a very exciting time. Technology is inviting audiences to enjoy a smorgasbord of audio content on-demand. It means the listener now has more control and choice than ever before, and it creates an opportunity for the everyday person on the street to develop their own platform for sharing content and being heard. It's going to make the radio industry even more competitive and focused on quality programming and production.

Particularly at this time of social distancing and isolation as a result of the coronavirus crisis, the radio industry really has a big part to play in keeping people informed but also entertained and uplifted.

■ ***You've managed the Awards since their inception in 2010. What are some of the key developments you've seen over the years?***

Well, if there's ever been doubt about the power of radio, the Radio Awards has shown that the medium is more alive than ever, and traditional radio stations are about so much more than what they broadcast on the airwaves.

Radio is a platform evolving to stay in tune with digital technology, so now not only can listeners enjoy access to quality content through podcasts, but they can also engage more directly with presenters and their shows via social media.

The community outreach initiatives that stations have undertaken to place listeners at the forefront – as they should be – have been impressive in using technology that allows them to become more responsive and accessible to their audiences.

■ ***More specifically, what changes have you made year-on-year to this year's Awards?***

We've made numerous tweaks over the past 10 years to ensure the Radio Awards reflect the dynamic nature of the industry and the appetite of listening audiences.

“ 10 years old!

Have a look at some of the numbers and history behind what has been an amazing journey in the life of The Radio Awards so far. pic.twitter.com/OTAlnUjmGw— @SARadioAwards (@SARadioAwards) [November 8, 2019](#) ”

In recent years internet radio has started to take off, and as such it's a category that has earned its place at the Awards, although we do believe there is still a way to go.

This year we introduced the Station Manager's Choice Award which gives station managers the opportunity to shine the light on an employee who does great work behind-the-scenes but is not on-air. It's easy to forget that radio stations depend on a solid team of people – other than presenters and producers – to keep a station alive, profitable and successful.

■ ***And then in terms of leadership changes, why did you decide to introduce an advisory panel / feel the need to make the Awards more inclusive?***

South Africa is a huge melting pot of cultures, languages and ideas, and being able to appreciate and celebrate our diversity is important. Rewarding that diversity requires the efforts of experienced people who can bring a more collaborative approach to decision-making. Having an advisory panel in place has allowed the Radio Awards to make decisions that more closely align with the needs of the radio industry and its diverse audiences.

■ ***Comment on the first decade of the Radio Awards. Growth, most outstanding achievements in the South African radio industry, highlights, etc.***

We had a steep learning curve when the Radio Awards were first launched in 2010 as the MTN Radio Awards. Back then we received only 196 entries from 15 radio stations, but we were thrilled. As someone who has walked the path of The Radio Awards since inception, to see them become the number one recognition event for the South African radio industry is hugely rewarding.

This year we celebrated a record number of entries (more than 2000) from a record number of radio stations (more than 160) – we really work hard to improve on lessons learned from previous years.

Each year we experience fresh highlights in recognising exceptional talent, but last year was especially memorable. At the gala dinner, we hosted two young sisters who were finalists in the Internet Radio category. Their show, *Books & Breakfast with Yusras* on Rx Radio, which broadcasts out of the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town, gave everyone the feels, even though they did not win the award. Those children could present a quality show - and use the power of radio for healing - was incredibly inspirational, and shows there's future talent in the industry that needs to be nurtured.



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What do you think has contributed to this year's record number of entries and stations?

Firstly, The Radio Awards are firmly established, undoubtedly upping the prestige of receiving an accolade that carries real weight. We've also had tremendous support and guidance from members of the NAB (National Association of Broadcasters), based on the feedback they've received from stations over the past few years.

And we also have an experienced project management team, backed by a strong advisory panel that emphasised the importance of transparency and the value of communicating it to the industry.

Our communications have been sincere, and we've kept the industry informed of what's happening every step of the way.

Having BDO South Africa on board as the new auditors have also upped the credibility of the results.



The Radio Awards announces 2020 finalists

18 Mar 2020



What are you most looking forward to regarding this year's Awards and in 2020 (regarding the industry) in general?

Well, with the recently declared state of disaster around the coronavirus pandemic, and the importance of social distancing, we have – as has everyone else – faced numerous challenges.

The Radio Awards gala dinner has developed a reputation as being one of the most exciting and highly anticipated events on the calendar, and unfortunately, the fun and camaraderie that is usually experienced will need to be put on hold until next year. But, with that being said, we've found a new opportunity that involves presenting the Awards through digital announcement and we're really excited to see how that is received. After all, necessity is the mother of invention.

We'd like to encourage the listeners, and the on-air and behind-the-scenes talent in the radio industry to sign up to watch the online Awards announcement by entering their details on the www.radioawards.co.za website.

So, be sure to register and follow [@SARadioAwards](https://twitter.com/SARadioAwards) #SARadioAwards #RadioAwards #RadioAwards2020 #MyStationCompetition for live updates. The Awards take place on Friday, 17 April at 2pm.

Taryn Westoby is the head of Arena Events, a division of Arena Holdings (formerly Tiso Blackstar Group), which owns and manages more than 60 events each year, linked to the various properties of the Group including Sunday Times, Business Day and Financial Mail amongst others. She launched and manages The Empire Conference and Events Venue located in Parktown, Johannesburg. She has more than 20 years' experience in media, marketing, publishing and events. She holds a BCom Honours degree from University of Witwatersrand, and an MBA from the Gordon Institute of Business Science.

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