

World Radio Day 2020: The Year of Sonic

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World Radio Day offers a chance to reflect on a medium that touches people's lives daily and is evolving far beyond a frequency.

2020 Has been dubbed 'The Year of Sonic', not just because a certain blue hedgehog is staging a comeback but as a reminder that audio is bigger than ever.

"Radio's super-power lies in the way it reflects and shapes the lives of the listener in real time," explains Primedia Broadcasting's Head of Insights and Analytics, Deborah Schepers.

"It connects listeners to their worlds and helps them navigate their days, either by making sense of a topic, by providing the soundtrack to their morning, or updating them on news, sport and weather. I think regional radio is a particularly powerful medium, as it links listeners to the very heart of their city."

The global resurgence of audio is also being driven by the current podcasting boom, as audiences embrace new on-demand formats. Whether on radio, or via cell phone or smart speaker, audio offers unmatched intimacy and memory encoding. Just think of the instantly recognisable sonic identities of McDonalds, Coca-Cola, Netflix or Intel. These brands are easily identified in audio-only environments, giving them an automatic advantage. Research by Westwood One has shown that sonic identity and jingles increase purchase intent by 44-58%.

Schepers believes that the key to connecting with audiences via audio, no matter the platform, is a memorable sonic brand: "As we celebrate World Radio Day 2020, we need to understand how brands can realise the opportunities offered by audio. A clear, consistent sonic identity is central to making audio work for you. Sonic DNA is the audio equivalent of a visual logo, capturing attention, reinforcing identity and triggering emotional connection to brands."

Audio is bigger than ever

An astonishing 29.4 million South Africans listen to the radio on an average weekday – a figure that's growing. 37 million South Africans are listening anytime in the week, with an average time spent listening per day of three hours and 36 minutes.

Podcasting is also the fastest-growing sector of media consumption in South Africa, with 19% of South Africans having listened to a podcast. This is according to the Infinite Dial study conducted locally in 2019. South Africa was also the country with the second highest growth in streaming audiences in 2018, with 39% of South Africans claiming to have listened to online audio in the past month.

Audio is on all the time

Audio is a hands-free, eyes-free medium – available when screens aren't, and consumed both as a primary activity and while doing other things (driving, walking, working, etc.). Research shows that audio ads work effectively whether they are at the forefront of the listener's attention or heard in the background. There are benefits to both conscious and unconscious processing.

Audio helps brands grow

Both audio-visual and audio advertising have a significant effect on helping brands spring to mind more readily in purchasing situations - a phenomenon called salience. When included in the mix, audio advertising significantly increases the effects of brand communication over audio-visual alone, by expanding a brand's network of mental associations and by increasing share of mind for a brand.

"Radio provides cost-efficient daytime reach that complements TV's evening lift, with the added benefit of the trusted relationships it enjoys with audiences," said Schepers.

Studies by iHeartMedia and Neuro-Insight show that radio ads consistently outperform TV ads in terms of memory encoding. The ear is faster than the eye, so much so that the mind processes spoken words 22% faster than the written word. A heard message is also remembered four to five times longer than a visual image. This is very important information for brands, as memory encoding is strongly associated with consumer choice and purchase behaviour.

Radio improves campaign ROI

An extensive analysis of data from multiple agencies in the UK by the Radio Advertising Bureau has shown that if existing budgets are reallocated from other media to give radio a 20% share of spend, overall campaign return on investment (ROI) increases by 8% on average.

There is even more to gain if budget weightings are shifted from TV and onto radio. Reallocating budget to give radio a 20% share of spend resulted in a 19% increase in ROI in the study.

This is not surprising – radio extends campaign reach across the day. When strong audio links are present, radio will also prompt recall of the TV commercial.

2020: The Year of Sonic

With big and growing reach, the promise of radio remains: a powerful way to reach audiences in an intimate environment which they trust and feel a high affinity towards.

Radio connects listeners to news and stories in their cities and communities through personalities who they love and can relate to.

Schepers believes that there's never been a time for brands to make their mark in the audio landscape: "With audio bigger than ever, 2020 is the year for brands to build out their sonic identities and take full advantage of radio's ability to make brands grow and increase campaign ROI."

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