

Community radio gets a R10m boost from immedia

Durban-based tech company, immedia has invested R10m to help African media entrepreneurs to build sustainable community radio by using Fabrik, a set of cloud-enabled digital tools that empower media entities to live-stream shows, grow and engage with audiences around the world, and benefit financially by monetising their audiences.



Source: pixabay.com

immedia, which has the backing of Microsoft and the Industrial Development Corporation, has been developing their Fabrik technology since 2017. Fabrik allows media entrepreneurs to upend the traditional notion of “we broadcast and you receive”, by creating a feedback loop that directly helps the stations and listeners that use it to leapfrog old technology, to become citizen journalists, and find their strategic space in a digitally transformed world. It is already being used by 15 commercial clients, including radio stations Gagasi FM, Smile 90.4FM and YFM.

As part of its Digital Leap programme, immedia will be giving its platform to qualifying media entrepreneurs across Africa for free for a year. This includes consultation, training and support to help monetize the technology, cumulatively valued at R10 million.

Phil Molefe, a veteran of broadcast radio in South Africa, head of business development and strategy at Fabrik, says the programme was key to the company’s vision to spearhead media transformation. He says the uptake of Fabrik by energetic entrepreneurs at community radio stations showed how empowering the suite of digital tools is. “It enables them to deepen their relationship with their audience and monetise it sustainably because the quality of their engagement with listeners is meaningful.”

Building stable, sustainable community radio across Africa

Molefe points out that while community media is often under-resourced and struggles to retain skills, the company's case studies have shown that it is more than possible for them to thrive - and that the Digital Leap programme is the kind of opportunity they need, and can succeed on.

Fabrik helps media entrepreneurs by solving key challenges for them, including:

- Providing them with a mobile application that allows community and campus radio stations to live-stream shows, as well host podcasts, allowing them to reach audiences well beyond the geographic constraints of their traditional radio broadcast signal.
- By shifting to a cloud-based tool, radio stations get access to archival and backup that is compliant with BCCSA and ICASA regulations. This helps them to significantly cut down on time and resources required to manually back up radio content to on-site servers or even tape.
- Messaging functionality, including push notifications, so that stations can better engage with their communities, publish written or multimedia content, and even promote active conversation between listeners. Push notifications help drive engagement by bringing attention to active competitions, surveys and polls, recently published content, and more.
- By encouraging listeners to register as a member and provide some of their personal information, such as geographics and demographics, stations are able to build audience profiles for their listeners, and gain a better understanding of their needs and preferences.
- These detailed analytics provided by Fabrik gives stations the data they need to convince advertisers and marketers of the value of promoting their products and services through the station's app, helping bring in much-needed revenue.

Fabrik has a range of users, and about 60% of their listeners have an opt-in relationship with their broadcasters. By building and growing owned communities, stations then stand to benefit financially by serving highly relevant ads to their digital listeners. In addition, where sales conversions on social media are around 2%, Fabrik users enjoy 8%.

According to Tamie Mbombo, head of Marketing and PR at Izwi loMzansi, a community radio station, says that the platform has revolutionised the station's engagement with its listeners, and has led the digital charge with featured podcasts and integrated advertising campaigns on the Izwi mobile app. "Community media's aim is to provide trusted information and expression, and Fabrik has helped do that," he says.

A change of mindset is required

The Fabrik team made some interesting observations based on the experiences of early adopters of the technology, including around community radio, where many advertisers and business decision makers are often dismissive of the audience. "For example, one of our clients is a station with an audience in the LSM 4-6 range. That audience is typically regarded as 'too poor' or too marginalised to go digital and yet our clients are proving that they are taking to it like ducks to water," Molefe says.

He says that the take-up by media entrepreneurs, either regarded as 'on the fringes' or as outliers, is the best showcase

for Fabrik. “They are doing what they do because nobody told them they couldn’t - and it is proving to be a great leveller. We’ve seen how powerful this platform is in the community media space, which is why we are looking at boosting the rate of transformation.”

Applications for the [Fabrik Digital Leap programme](#) are now open.

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