

# Radio Ca Ca

 By [nick feinberg](#)

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A current DSTV commercial advertising the *Graham Norton Show* encapsulates my pain these days... a real indictment on the current state of programming in this country. According to the ad, you'll experience things on his show that you just won't see or hear anywhere in South Africa! Ok, he gets a stream of 'A-listers', but it has to be one of the most tame, family-friendly productions available to mankind. But can it be argued?



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Because barring a few DA type revolutionaries who have attempted dismally to set up cyber stations, it's hard to find any outspoken, opinionated, or even slightly edgy programming. I'm reaching the end of my listening tether, where did it all go? You know, radio post the Stan Katz and co offering? The period that coincided with the liberation of South Africa, when the Voice of Soweto was mutating into YFM, a time when creativity and progressive thinking was released from the conservative shackles of a BBC handbook, Capital Gold impersonators like Alex Jay and bile provoking Kevin Savage types in all their pompoustrophy.

## Brainless cheese

My god, when will these guys stop spouting 80's anecdotes? "Oh, how I miss the days when I used to splice audio tape together with a bit of chewing gum? Content? Everyone talks about content. In our days, we were the content". I too am from that era, an era when – the UK's – Tony Blackburn was a radio demigod, a time when 'disc jockeys' emulated his incredible ability to – without thinking – link together a radio show with a 3-hour smile and 32-word vocabulary.



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It was the type of brainless cheese our industry is regressing to now. A space driven by station minions led by boardrooms too interested in the end of fiscal dividends to worry about such trivial matters as creativity, passion and substance. It's not dissimilar to the English Premier League. The architects of which have done a mesmerizing job in monetizing what was simply, a 'working man's game' which included a couple of pints and a punch-up on a Saturday afternoon.

There's little room for youngsters to break into first team action, readymade, been round-the-block players are bought and sold during transfer windows and the football itself has morphed into one playing style. The only difference being, clubs backed with bent rubles, dollars and riyals play it better than others because they invest in the best coaches and players.

## Being yourself is the new different

The audience is no different, gone are the tattoo on the heart home and away fans, brought up in the game, they've been replaced with spectators happy to be fed a sanitised, lacklustre version of what once was. Investors don't want standing on terraces or swearing, nor youth players who're lack of experience might be deemed a bit of a risk. They want a Shaftsbury Avenue theatre experience, complete with panini's and craft beer to maximise revenue. Yes, this is radio today, anything considered even slightly risqué is viewed as bad for business, god forbid anyone who touches on religion, says "penis" or makes fun of a corporate brand!

Stand aside anyone who – ironically – happens to have a 'personality'. While there's a buzz saying in my town of birth – London – "being yourself is the new different", we are currently being served up the latest DJ clone era – similar to the 80's – where everyone is saying the same kind of stuff, in the same kind of way to a dumbed down audience programmed and ready to receive. That's right, "true story" they're "living their best life" followed by incessant seal type laughter, swiftly into a feature intro on 'hotkey's' all packaged and mirrored with plastic pics on social media.

What seems muffled is the distinction between adults having fun and adults behaving like children. Of course, the problem is, radio, like the Premier League is making plenty of moola, so my pathetic utterings in the background will never be heard. The days of exciting, creative radio are largely over, (hence many of the baffling winners at the recent Liberty Radio Awards) the type of radio that REALLY got people talking, the spikes in programming that encouraged CUME without CUME campaigns, the type of shows that you really didn't want to miss. I hate missing Robert Marawa's MSW by the way.



#LibertyRadioAwards: ALL THE WINNERS!

13 Apr 2019



## Shows need to be cast accordingly

But does it really matter when the public isn't complaining, listenership figures are more than stable and revenue is being generated? No, of course, it doesn't it's a frikkin business, well, not short-term anyway. The great thing about radio in South Africa is that the many languages and diverse communities will to a large extent help avoid the Pick n Pay, spazza shop scenario that is sweeping so-called 'advanced markets', where stations are being bought up, bunched and flagship shows networked across groups.

We'll continue serving our specific audiences. I would, however, like to think that while playlists, personalities and content draw closer together, a great advantage can be taken right now in differentiating from the norm, providing a bit of spark, encouraging opinions, opening up relevant debates and taking a little risk here and there... Some of the formulaic attributes

that have propelled reality TV to the forefront of popular media.

Shows need to be cast accordingly, sure, there's room for 'bimbo' characters, but in and amongst sharp, witty, intelligent co-hosts who are properly keyed into the communities they are broadcasting to. We are drenched in graphic news, grotesque violence and sexual imagery on a daily basis, kids are blowing the brains out of zombies on PlayStation. I'm not sure that a slight shift in this direction would constitute a gamble in any way? Of course, I say with a defeatist wry smile, the content of this article does not in any way represent the views of Heart FM or *The Daily Voice*.

## ABOUT NICK FEINBERG

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