

SABC

The SABC... informing a nation... inspiring the future



Guglielmo Marconi

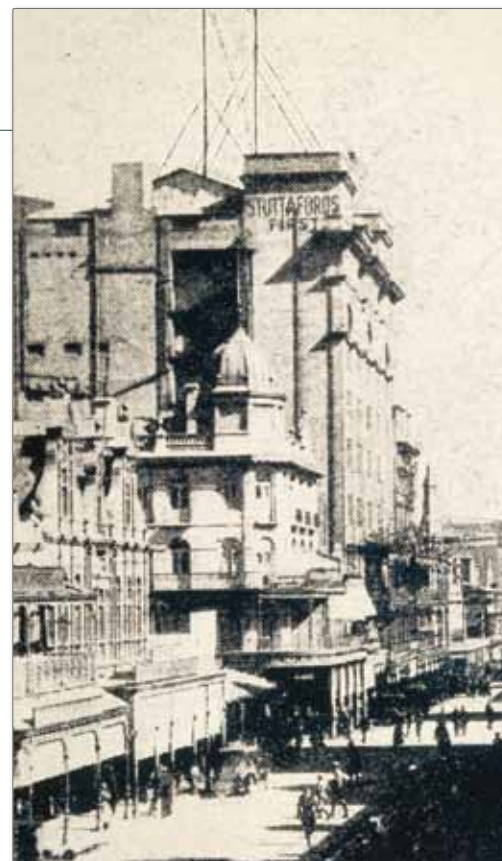


December 2011 marks the 110th birthday of broadcasting worldwide. On 21 December 1901, Marconi sent his first radio signal, sparking what would change the world forever.

Broadcasting mania came to South Africa in a big way in November 1923, when, to raise money for a South African stand at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, the South African Railways in Johannesburg borrowed equipment from the Western Electric Company and set it up in their headquarters building, to broadcast dance concerts.

Various halls on and near the reef were provided with receivers, amplifiers and loud-speakers (large silver-coloured, trumpet-shaped instruments). Admission fees were charged and it was hoped to raise a substantial amount of money in a week of broadcasting. The first concert broadcast was on 18 December 1923. It was an enormous success, but the owners of the transmitter made it quite clear that at the end of the week the set would be returned to America.

There was considerable opposition to the cessation of broadcasts, and the Associated Scientific Technical Societies decided that there was enough interest, commercially as well as from the public, to establish a permanent broadcasting station. They then took over the Western Electric Company Equipment, set up masts on the roof of Stuttafords in Johannesburg and moved into a suite on the top floor. They called the station "JB Calling". Two other similar radio services were started by the Cape Peninsula Publicity Association (with their studio in the Stuttafords Building in Cape



Flashback to 1924: the Stuttafords building in Johannesburg which housed the studios of South Africa's very first professional radio station, JB Calling. Note the aerial on the top of the building.

Town, whilst the studio of the Durban Municipal Broadcasting Station was situated in the loft of the City Hall).

Few South African households at the time (1924) had radio sets. This caused speculation as to whether or not it was a viable idea to set up 'listening-in-theatres' where people could congregate to listen to the radio. For those lucky enough to own a radio, it became fashionable to hold radio parties.

In 1927, the Schlesinger Organisation's African Broadcasting Company Ltd (ABC) took control of the three independent radio stations, rescuing them from bankruptcy and closure.

The establishment of the SABC

The Great Depression (the economic slump triggered by the stock market crash of 1929), affected the whole world in the thirties. There was mass unemployment and great suffering. The main escape for millions of poverty stricken people was radio; which allowed them to lose themselves in the theatre of the mind for a while.

In 1934, the then Prime Minister, General JBM Hertzog, invited British broadcasting

expert, Lord John Charles Reith to head a commission to investigate establishing a national broadcaster in South Africa. The Reith Report recommended that the government take over the African Broadcasting company (ABC) to achieve this. The report eventually led to draft legislation and then an Act of Parliament, establishing the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The government paid 150 000 pounds to acquire the ABC and the SABC officially went on air on 1 August 1936 - with a legacy of about 150 000 licensed radio sets and probably around 750 000 listeners. It broadcast from studios in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.

The golden era of radio

When the SABC first started to broadcast, its new radio service was in English. The Broadcasting Act, however, prescribed the inception of a parallel Afrikaans service and 15 months later, an Afrikaans radio service was introduced.

The programme output of the studios grew dramatically. In one year, it was described as "phenomenal" when the output was eight operas broadcast live, seven commercial recordings of operas, 12 Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, 22 other operettas, 16 musicals, 135 English dramas and 181 other contributions by local talent.

Unfortunately, by 1939 the golden era of radio came under threat due to storm clouds gathering over Europe, heralding the Second World War. From a political point of view, the SABC came under pressure from various groups, especially those who were against the war effort, but the SABC had, at the time, openly declared that it supported the government. The SABC began to broadcast for 18 hours a day, from 06:00 to midnight, with news updates on the war every hour.

In 1940, the first direct transmissions in African languages were made by telephone line, (as a wartime measure) and broadcasts in isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho, were relayed to townships. By 1942, direct broadcasts in African languages were introduced on medium wave and by 1943 the SABC began tentative experiments with the FM broadcasting system.



SABC dancing club was broadcast on the English service on Sat night at 10 pm

South Africa's first commercial radio station

The Board of the SABC had for many years expressed opposition to a commercial station, but by the mid-1940s it was plain that sooner or later commercial radio would have to be considered, and on 1 May 1950 Springbok Radio made its first broadcast. From the start, it was a resounding success - announcers found themselves catapulted into the limelight and they were mobbed by eager fans when they made public appearances.

By 1952, Springbok Radio was bringing in millions of rands' worth of advertising revenue - the first commercial ever to be broadcast on the SABC was a ten word slogan for Edblo mattresses on Springbok Radio.

The first national market research survey into a radio station was done in 1952, two years after the birth of Springbok Radio. It showed that Springbok had 632 000 adults listening to it on an average day - at the height of its popularity, it

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One of three SABC Mobile Recording Units, which accompanied the South African troops to North Africa, during the second World War.



The doyen of black broadcasters, King Edward Masinga

“ King Edward Masinga, who was employed in the SABC’s Durban studios from 1941 until his retirement in 1965, translated most of Shakespeare’s plays into isiZulu and also undertook the productions. ”

had an audience of over two million!

For 35 years, Springbok Radio ruled the airwaves, feeding its insatiable audience hit shows, popular dramas and light music.

The SABC introduced its own national news service in July 1950, serving the English Service, Afrikaans Service and Springbok Radio with daily news bulletins. To everyone’s surprise, the news bulletins soon proved to be the most popular programmes on radio and the initial four bulletins a day were increased to six.

By 1960, full-scale radio programme services were introduced in isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho (referred to as Radio Bantu). Each of these radio stations broadcast for 90 minutes a day on medium and shortwave transmitters. These were followed in 1962 by services in Sepedi and Setswana, and in 1965, by services in xiTsonga and tshiVenda.

Popular from the start, these services attracted large audiences and massive audience reaction by way of letters. The inception of radio services in African languages gave rise to demand for black people to fill positions at the various stations. New Radio Stations also opened up avenues for the abundance of black talent that, until then, had had scant opportunities for display. Writers, authors,

Uzowuzwa umoya

ASD 2010



When television was introduced in 1976, the annual license fee was R36. There were 716 000 licensed viewers and the piracy rate was just 5 percent

actors, musicians and composers all contributed massively to the broadcast material required by stations.

Plays and serials were extremely popular, and the response from talented members of the public to competitions for scripts was overwhelming. The doyen of black broadcasters, King Edward Masinga, who was employed in the SABC’s Durban studios from 1941 until his retirement in 1965, translated most of Shakespeare’s plays into isiZulu and also undertook the productions. He was the first black announcer to broadcast in his mother tongue.

SABC subscription form

SABC Magazine		SUBSCRIPTION FORM FOR POSTAL SUBSCRIBERS
To the S.A. Broadcasting Corporation, P.O. Box 8606, Johannesburg.		
I wish to subscribe to SABC for a period of _____ months and enclose cheque/postal order/money order for _____ The magazine is to be sent to:—		
Name _____		
Address _____		
Subscription rates for postal subscribers: R1 per issue or R10 for six months in the Union and S.A.A.; R1 50 for 60 per year in the African Postal Union (i.e. Rhodesia, Botswana, etc.) and R1 50 in other countries.		

At 05:00 on September 1, 1964 Radio Highveld went on air. It was a special day for radio in South Africa, since it was the birth of the very first regional radio station on VHF-FM. Radio Highveld was also the first all-music commercial radio station of the SABC.

And then came television

The big broadcasting news in South Africa in the seventies was the hype around the introduction by the SABC of television into the country. Test transmissions started on 5 May 1975. Things improved as the test transmissions became braver: the hit show of 1975 was *"The Brady Bunch"*, the first American sitcom ever to be screened on TV in South Africa.

The new television service was launched officially on 5 January, screening a mix of American, British and European programmes with a healthy dose of local product. The first 'news reader' on opening night, at 18:01, was the puppet *Haas Das*, in the kiddies' programme *Haas Das se Nuuskas*. For the first two years, there were no commercials on television. So, when the SABC announced that it was to introduce commercials on 1 January 1978, excitement and hype surrounded the identity of the first commercial ever to be transmitted. Under tight wraps, the SABC called for tenders from companies to bid for the first slot. So, just after 18:00, the first ever 30 second TV commercial for Big T Burgers was flighted on SABC TV.

In 1982, Radio Swazi was introduced on FM, Radio Ndebele followed in 1983. 1986 saw the introduction of Radio Metro, the first English Radio Station directed specifically at black urban listeners throughout the country. It was also the first station run by a black manager. In 1993, the Board of the SABC announced steps to expand coverage of broadcasts in African languages, making it accessible to millions more people.

More programme services on African language stations were developed. The eighties also saw the introduction of Lotus FM (a radio station specifically for Indian listeners). But up until then, the SABC's Afrikaans and English radio services had never, since their inception in 1936, taken commercials. The English, Afrikaans and Springbok Radio services were discontinued at midnight on 31 December 1985, the next morning Radio South Africa (now SAfm), Radio Suid-Afrika (now Radiosondergrense) and Radio 2000 started broadcasting.

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It involved 1 400 members of staff drawn from all sectors of the SABC, 35 remote broadcasting points, international link ups and nearly six days of solid broadcasting.”



The era of transformation

Political change in the form of true democracy made its first tentative steps in South Africa in the early 1990s and it was inevitable that the SABC, as the National Public Broadcaster, would have to be in the vanguard of making the new political order visible. To this end, the first democratic SABC Board ever to be appointed, after extensive and exhaustive public hearings, came to power in 1993.

In April 1994, the transforming SABC was faced with its greatest challenge: Election '94 was the biggest, most complex broadcast by the SABC since the inception of television in SA. It involved 1 400 members of staff drawn from all sectors of the SABC, 35 remote broadcasting points, international link ups and nearly six days of solid broadcasting. On radio, election coverage was in all the official languages on 11 public broadcasting stations, and on TV in the seven main languages on two channels.

By June 1994, the SABC's view on its future role as a public broadcaster was spelt out in a series of documents entitled: "Delivering Value". The basic principle of these documents was that if the SABC were to become a legitimate institution and a respected vehicle in society, it had to deliver programmes of value efficiently and effectively to the communities, and had to be publicly accountable for its performance.

One of the major achievements of the nineties was planning and creating new television channels (SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3) to replace those launched under the previous banner of apartheid. The new channels, when they went on air on 4 February 1996, were the result of much research and in line with the SABC's commitment to deliver full spectrum services to all South Africans, in all parts of the country and in all official languages. There is no doubt that 1996





stands out as one of the most important in the history of the SABC, as the National Public Service Broadcaster launched its new TV channels SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3. These channels were introduced to the country, during a launch at the Waterkloof Air Force base before 3000 invited guests. VIPs included President Nelson Mandela and celebrity overseas guests Blair Underwood (from LA Law), Robert Guillaume (from Benson), Malcolm-Jamal Warner (The Cosby Show) singer Stevie Wonder and entertainer Shari Belafonte. These new channels were to be the visible face of the SABC's commitment to transform from a commercially driven state broadcaster to a programme and audience driven public broadcaster. The SABC became the first of the mainstream media to redirect itself to serve the needs of the new South Africa.

On the radio front, the scene was being set for major transformation too. A priority was bringing the SABC's 22 internal radio stations in line with the vision and values of the board. Part of the vision clearly spelt out that the SABC would deliver accessible broadcasting of equal quality to all its audiences. The sale of the six regional stations cleared the way for the SABC to introduce its repositioned radio portfolio to the world. Therefore, on 28 September 1996, some 50 000 people packed Johannesburg's Athletics Stadium to attend the launch of the SABC's new radio portfolio. The line-up of the 16 radio stations, complete with new names and

new identities, finally broke the mould in which SABC Radio had been cast since its inception in 1936.



In May 1999, a new broadcasting law, the Broadcasting Act (No 4) of 1999, was set to irrevocably change the face of broadcasting in South-Africa. It provided for three categories of broadcasting: public service, commercial and community. The SABC was set to become a limited liability company with the State as 100 percent shareholder and was to be restructured into separate public service and public commercial service arms.

In 2002, the SABC appointed the world's first San radio news journalists, to do duty on XK-fm, the Kimberley-based community radio station broadcasting in the !Xu and Khwe languages of the KhoiSan people. The journalists compile seven daily news bulletins for the station, and produce a current affairs programme. The contributions are compiled in Afrikaans as a 'bridging language' between the !Xu and Khwe communities.

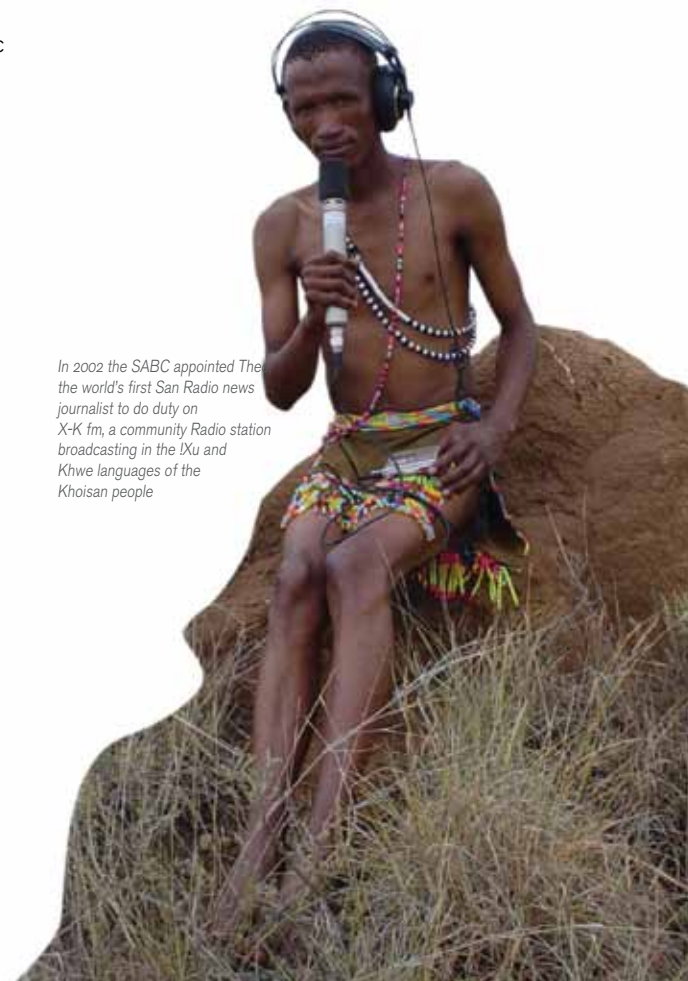
As the National Public Service Broadcaster, the SABC recognises that for many of its viewers and listeners, it is the only source of affordable entertainment, reliable information and education in all official languages. The SABC established that a number of people in South Africa still don't have access to any television channel or radio station.

In 2007, the SABC commenced with the switch on of low power transmitters in remote areas throughout the country. Some of the

areas to have benefited from this mandated SABC project include: Philippolis and Villiers in the Free State Province, Indermark in the Limpopo Province and Genadendal in the Western Cape. The SABC anticipates it would have switched on no less than 100 low-power transmitters by the end of 2011.

As the country's biggest electronic communicator, the SABC is committed to continue to play a meaningful role in the continuous development of the Electronic Broadcasting environment.

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The SABC's four High Definition Outside Broadcast Units were used extensively during the 2010 FIFA World Cup™. The SABC also took the initiative of leading the broadcasting industry by successfully implementing a Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) Trial Project in South Africa. The results of research conducted suggested a promising future for Digital Terrestrial Television, as 80 percent of the trialists indicated that they saw value in the service and as the provision of public value in a digital environment becomes even more challenging and important, the SABC plans to extend its content provision onto digital platforms through the establishment of a Digital Media Division. One of the Division's key objectives will be to lead on the delivering of the DTT project, working with internal teams, Industry and suppliers to deliver the necessary platform and transmission infrastructure for the SABC to play a critical role in the future.

The National Public Service Broadcaster, reaching 24 million people daily, was perfectly positioned to host one of the biggest sporting spectacles in the world in June 2010. During the 30 day 2010 FIFA World Cup™ tournament the SABC broadcast all 64 games live across its three television channels and 18 radio stations in 11 official languages with simulcast on radio!

The broadcast of the emotional opening ceremony and match between South Africa and Mexico, broke the record for the highest viewership ever recorded for a TV station worldwide, surpassing the SABC's self-set target of 73 percent television audience share, reaching a new South African record of 75.85 percent share of television viewers!

The SABC's marketing campaign, "Feel it. It is here" was aimed at mobilising all South

Africans to rally behind Bafana Bafana, to be patriotic, fly the national flag and sing the South African Anthem. The campaign went viral and quickly became the catch phrase that dominated every sphere of South African life during the tournament; the campaign no longer belonged



to the SABC but to all South Africans.

With News as the pillar of the SABC's Public Service Broadcasting mandate, the organisation intends to launch a 24 Hour News Channel on satellite that will tell African and International stories from an African perspective. The channel will be launched towards the end of 2011 and will also be made available on Digital Terrestrial Television.

As the National Public Broadcaster, the SABC will remain the catalyst for positive social action, assisting in transforming society through the content that it provides, reflecting the true image of our country, its people, its dreams and aspirations.



SABC's 2010 FIFA World Cup™ broadcast was anchored from a state-of-the-art set in Sandton, Johannesburg