

Something's rotten in the state of radio

By Daryl Ilbury: @darylilbury

21 May 2010

If the events of last weekend are to be believed, then to paraphrase Marcellus in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, something is rotten in the state of radio in South Africa; and I may need your help to get to the bottom of it. After all, sooner or later someone has to point to the elephant in the room and say something.



MTN Radio Awards

To do so, I need you to imagine that on the wall in front of you is a map of South Africa. On the table next to you are a small wooden box and an envelope. The box contains 56 pins. Each pin is in fact a small MTN flag. The envelope next to the box contains the list of the winners of this year's inaugural [MTN Radio Awards](#). Using the pins, you are to mark on the map the location from which each winning radio station broadcasts. Once that is done, you are to stand back and tell me what you see.

This is, of course, a purely rhetorical exercise as I have already done it, and I know what the result is.

Let me tell you what you will see: one flag in each of the following locations: Durban, PE, Polokwane and Senekal; and two in Cape Town. The rest will be found bristling in the Johannesburg-Pretoria metropole. (To be fair, there were one or two other Cape Town stations that won, but they were joint winners with their sister stations in Johannesburg.)

So what does this tell us?

Fair reflection or not

Briefly, one of two things: either it is a fair reflection of the state of radio in South Africa (and that all that is truly wonderful in radio is radiated only from Gauteng); or it's not; in which case there's something seriously wrong with the voting and/or judging (and therefore the validity) of the MTN Radio Awards.

Before we go any further, let me shoot across the bows of anyone thinking it's a case of sour grapes because I didn't win anything. I am no longer on air and therefore could not have been eligible. I am speaking now as a veteran broadcaster, radio analyst and consultant, and, more importantly, as someone who has always been passionate about creating powerful radio.

Let's assume the first suggestion is correct, and that Gauteng is indeed the home of talented radio people. Why would this be? Why are the talented people all in Gauteng? Is it the lure of the big money? If so, what does it say of those who chase it? Or is it because there are more opportunities in Gauteng, say, in TV? If so, what does it say for those who chase it (TV really only being for those who can't crack it in radio)?

Sounds a little nasty

I know, it sounds a little nasty to suggest that all people who work in radio from Gauteng are shallow, money-grabbing monsters.

So if that's not the case, and that all the really talented people just *happen* to be in Gauteng, that must mean that all those radio people who are not are idiots who don't know the first thing about professional radio. Gauteng is then the seat of some form of great radio empire that blesses the outlying, hick colonies, such as Durban, Cape Town, PE, Nelspruit and Bloemfontein, with its wisdom and cutting edge entertainment; and that the people who live in these other areas are only too happy to be blessed in this way.

No, we can't say that.

Then there has to be something wrong with the voting or judging of the MTN Radio Awards.

As for the organisation behind the awards, Jeremy Maggs and his team should be congratulated for all the hard work they have done to highlight excellence in the media; and, from what I can gather, the means of voting was pretty straightforward.

So that would suggest that something was amiss with the judging. A brief examination of the judges wouldn't provide any clues; they are a veritable who's who of media. Each one of them is a recognised star in his or her area of expertise.

Most of them live in Joburg

So where could the problem be?

If you were to dig deeper into the judges, you'd find what could be the answer: most of them live in Johannesburg, have lived there for many years, and have grown up listening to the stations that were judged the winners. Those judges that don't live in Gauteng, live in Cape Town. Remind me again where the next highest number of awards came from?

Like Marcellus in *Hamlet*, I am merely a keen observer, keeping an eye on the state of things; protecting its integrity as it were. I am not for one minute suggesting that the judges in this year's MTN Radio Awards were biased in any way, but given the fondness in humans for what is familiar, I do think next year the net for judges should be cast a little wider.

ABOUT DARYL ILBURY: @DARYLILBURY

Daryl Ilbury is an op-ed columnist, radio analyst and consultant who specialises in the critical arena of talent development. He is a veteran of over 20 years in breakfast radio, having worked for East Coast Radio and Talk Radio 702. He was also a 2011 MTN Radio Awards judge. www.darylilbury.com features an original, free online resource for radio professionals. Contact Daryl on cell +27 (0)82 445 8141, email daryl@darylilbury.com and follow [@darylilbury](https://twitter.com/darylilbury) on Twitter.

- Radio programming consultants. Why? - 23 May 2011
- The delicate balance in radio [part 1] - 22 Mar 2011
- [2011 trends] The year SA's radio industry gets the serious jolt needed - 11 Jan 2011
- What radio should learn from reality TV - 22 Nov 2010
- Radio's neglected moral responsibility - 11 Oct 2010

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>