

# The enduring charm of radio dramas in the digital age

 By [Candy Dempers](#), issued by [MediaHeads 360](#)

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In a fast-paced world overflowing with digital content, it's natural to wonder if the old-school charm of radio dramas still holds up in 2023.



In short, the answer is a resounding yes, as the format continues to offer a unique blend of traditional media and modern trends, significantly benefiting corporate clients after innovative ways to connect with their target audience.

Radio dramas are particularly well-known and impactful in the South African context. Brands have long used the format to connect with audiences using unique characters, storylines and promotional messages. These bridge the entertainment/education divide and create a personal connection with audiences. Blended content themes coupled with a mixed media approach also keep audiences well informed, which is particularly important in an increasingly attention-stretched landscape.

## How radio dramas have stayed popular

Today's most relevant radio dramas stay true to their origins, though being willing to experiment and adapt where necessary. Thriving programmes continue to captivate listeners with similar backgrounds, economic standings, and core interests, delicately leaning on life pillars like tradition, social dilemmas and shared values to tell impactful stories.

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, brands realised this more than ever. Shows repositioned themselves to be more educational, allowing advertisers to insert themselves subtly into relevant, tricky conversations. Captivating storylines took up the entertainment factor too, driving word-of-mouth on social media. Loyal listeners felt seen and heard during an unprecedented time in history.

Nearly four years on, despite the digital audio landscape being in a very different place technologically, radio dramas continue to find a loyal audience that feels at home with the format.

## The continued success of *Iketsetse Zenzele*

*Iketsetse Zenzele*, now entering its eleventh season in production, is a testament to the enduring charm of radio dramas in South Africa. The series is part of Standard Bank's Wallet Wise financial education initiative. It runs 15 episodes yearly in

ten of South Africa's eleven official languages.

In this 11th season, the radio drama continues to tackle pressing issues facing South Africa in the wake of mounting inflation and the escalating cost of living. The series addresses vital financial and life challenges including responsible borrowing, savings, insurance, and home loans. It also aims to empower its audience with knowledge and practical guidance on issues such as fraud awareness, alternative banking, and estate planning.

"In Africa, storytelling has been notable in teaching lifelong lessons. Building on the story from last season, the new storylines are both interesting and relatable, providing great entertainment value. The various characters represent a cross-section of society, so listeners can identify with one or more of them, depending on their financial journey," says Candy Dempers, managing director for Mediaheads360.

In an era of ever-evolving communication mediums, *Iketsetse Zenzele* (a combination of Setswana and isiZulu which means 'Do it yourself'), the radio series stands as a shining example of the enduring power of radio to captivate and educate audiences.

"Through its young, energetic characters, the drama shows everyday money challenges and encourages listeners to take charge of their finances by showing them how to start where they are on their financial journey and live within their means," says Itumeleng Matlaila, head of brand and marketing, mass, middle, youth, South Africa, for Standard Bank.

At its core, it wants to be taken seriously as a channel for financial literacy. Whether learning how to spot a scam or offering advice to prevent being the victim of cybercrime, great scriptwriting and good production value have made it a trustworthy ally to listeners around the country.

The drama has pushed the boundaries content-wise since day one, with its most recent instalment tapping into interesting new avenues to continue driving high levels of audience participation. The proof of this is in the pudding.

### **By the numbers**

In a 2022 study (research conducted by Insights2020; 2022; n=937), *Iketsetse Zenzele* scored highly with a sample audience when asked about whether it is fulfilling its purpose. The research also revealed a significant influx of new listeners, with a 36% increase over the two years prior.

This has led to a marked rise in spontaneous awareness about the show, growing from 80% in 2021 to an impressive 97% by the third quarter of 2022. Listeners are also more engaged, with a 23% growth in listening to the weekly episode every week, a 12% growth in listening to every episode released and a 14% growth in listening to 2 to 3 episodes!

These results speak to the series' success in attracting, nurturing and retaining an audience from a content and strategic perspective, hitting the sweet spot while looking out for new avenues to grow its audience (and offer advertisers a larger slice of their target market).

### **Social media's important role**

Social media's role in introducing *Iketsetse Zenzele* to new listeners increased by 11% between 2021 and 2022. Naturally, it has become an additional input for the show to work with in terms of content and brand opportunities. Chatter about episodes has spanned popular social media platforms Snapchat, X, and Instagram.

These have become instrumental in promoting added value content, giving audiences a chance to interact with the programme and its characters and offering a new platform for advertisers to tap into.

This bodes well for the decade ahead, where artificial intelligence (AI) will take centre stage. Brands must prepare and grab new opportunities with both hands as they arrive.

## An elevated listening experience

The digital revolution has made radio dramas more accessible than ever, with listeners no longer required to be bound to radio at a fixed hour to hear them.

Today, easily shareable episodes are available through streaming and social media platforms too, adding another layer helping to keep the format alive and well in the modern world. This newfound flexibility allows listeners to enjoy episodes in various settings, from their daily commute through to stage six load shedding.

The digital aspect has also opened dramas up to real-time feedback, making them more responsive and attuned to their audience preferences than ever. Technology has reinvigorated the format, where multi-faceted, elevated listening experiences are the order of the day.

## Connect and soar

Radio dramas continue to captivate audiences with powerful, creative storytelling. The trusty format is unique in the way it blends education, information and entertainment in an intimate way that more modern (tech-led) formats are still trying to figure out.

Knowing this, it's no wonder that local brand marketing campaigns tap into radio dramas as one of the tools to connect directly with their target audience in association with high-quality, well-produced content that stretches the listener's imagination.

*Iketsetse Zenzele* proves that the formula works, with the facts to back it up. Earned trust is at the heart of its longevity in the market, reminding us that once a radio drama establishes itself, listeners get hooked for life.

Deep bonds need nurturing. Brands must come to the party with an open, innovative mindset. With the nation's top creatives steering these campaigns, there is endless potential for this unique, quirky format.

In a noisy world, what could be better than being known as charming and consistent?

## ABOUT CANDY DEMPERS

Candy Dempers has loved all things media for twenty-three years. A sales and marketing specialist, her first love was radio and bringing brands and platforms together.

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