

Back to the future – medium wave?

Who remembers the heady days of LM Radio, Capital Radio 604 and even Springbok Radio broadcasting loud (but perhaps not so clearly) on medium wave in South Africa?

With the advent of FM radio, medium and shortwave local broadcasts became a thing of the past as they lacked the quality and stereo capabilities of FM. However, the very fact that so many stations require space on this overcrowded frequency has prompted various other transmission methods in an effort to make use of both medium and short wave frequencies, while maintaining the high quality of FM technology.

One example is the digital radio standard developed by Digital Radio Mondiale™ (DRM), an international not-for-profit consortium, composed of broadcasters, network providers, transmitter and receiver manufacturers, universities, broadcasting unions and research institutes. The aim of the DRM Consortium is to support and spread a digital broadcasting system suitable for use in all the frequency bands up to and including VHF Band III.

“DRM is the universal, openly standardised digital broadcasting system designed for all broadcasting frequencies, thus covering very large geographical areas and reaching listeners in remote areas of a country,” says Radu Peter Obreja, marketing director of DRM.

Obreja believes that the DRM standard is the only global, all bands, open, efficient and green digital audio broadcasting



DIGITAL SPREAD: DRM Uniwave Di-Wave 100 radio

solution. He continues: “DRM has two major configurations – DRM30 is intended for broadcasts on short, medium and long wave up to 30 MHz and provides very large coverage and low power consumption. The configuration for the VHF bands above 30 MHz is called DRM+, tailored for local and regional coverage with broadcaster-controlled transmissions. These configurations are two digital broadcast modes on a single standard.

“The DRM configurations share the same

audio coding, data and multimedia services, service linking, and signalling schemes. DRM provides high, FM quality sound, combined with a wealth of enhanced features such as Surround Sound, Journaline text information, Slideshow and EPG.”

A key feature of the DRM standard is the Emergency Warning and Alert System, which is vital for governments of large countries, where such messages need to be sent instantly to remote areas without

television or mobile phones.

DRM is very cost effective for broadcasters to run, as they don't have to resort to multiplexes, which are expensive to use and maintain. DRM, by using all radio bands, has a very wide reach in big countries, where the traditional FM signal does not reach. For an FM signal to reach all corners of a large country, broadcasters / governments need to go to huge expenses to install hundreds of expensive transmitters to cover those areas in FM. With DRM, this is not the case. By using the AM bands, the DRM standard reaches all remote areas.

“By having DRM digital broadcasts, there is no longer the need for both broadcasters and listeners to refer to AM or FM,” explains Obreja, “as the radio stations are accessed by their own station names and not by their frequency.”

Capital Radio 604, popular in the 1980s for its broadcasts from the Transkei into KwaZulu-Natal, may well be back on medium wave and intends offering an AM service. It could also launch digital broadcasts using DRM and take advantage of the internet as a listening platform.

The station's investors include ex-governor of the Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni, veteran broadcaster Kevin Savage and technical guru Mark Williams.

It is believed that there are seven South African applicants for broadcast licences on medium wave pending, all of who are interested in using DRM. – **Andy Stead**

Taking audience immersion to the 'MAX'



A NEW WAVE: Fiaz Mahomed

Southern African cinema chain Ster-Kinekor Theatres has completed an agreement with IMAX® Corporation to install an IMAX® theatre at its flagship cinema complex in the Gateway Theatre of Shopping in Durban by November this year.

After the demise of the original IMAX® theatres in South Africa at the end of June 2010, CEO of Ster-Kinekor Theatres, Fiaz Mahomed is confident that the new wave of the ultra-big-screen experience couldn't have come at a better time.

“We've always been friends and fans of IMAX® at the same time,” says Mahomed. “However, we weren't supporters of the model that was presented at the time. We believed that it had a limited lifespan because it wasn't going to be profitable for anyone in this territory and unfortunately we were proven right.”

Mahomed adds that the original cost of operating IMAX® relative to ticket prices that could be charged didn't add up. Secondly, there wasn't sufficient Hollywood content on this format. “From a business perspective in a cinema environment we need the Hollywood content for people to watch.

“The new IMAX® technology is superior

to what it was in the past and the financial model to run it is a lot more palatable to us, and we believe in this model. The content is significantly better in terms of quality and quantity relative to our market.”

According to Mahomed the inclusion of digital technology makes IMAX® a lot more efficient and he confirms that Ster-Kinekor will screen 23 titles over the next year.

Thor: The Dark World starring Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman, Tom Hiddleston, Idris Elba and Anthony Hopkins shows first in Gateway's IMAX® theatre, although a specific date had not been determined at the time of going to press.

“The screen is being built to spec according to the latest DMR technology in Canada. It arrives in October and that date will determine when we can open,” confirms Mahomed.

“IMAX® is a premium experience and we'll follow the trend across the world for it to work. Although it has to have a higher ticket price, the value will be unsurpassed.”

Mahomed comments that Ster-Kinekor is busy with an evaluation of its number of sites and the company's intention is to roll out more IMAX® theatres and to be representative of the bigger malls across

South Africa.

Ster-Kinekor is following the worldwide trend that IMAX® is part of existing cinema chains. “Across the world that is the model that is being used and that is part of the reason it has become viable,” he says.

“IMAX® will never be as wide as 3D, for example, but it will be wide enough that audiences will have a truly immersive IMAX® cinema experience close to them.

“The track record of IMAX® box-office continues to do very well across the world and there is no reason why it wouldn't do well here. We think all the necessary boxes can be ticked and it's time for Ster-Kinekor to enter the IMAX® world,” concludes Mahomed.

Other titles audiences can expect are *Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (shot with IMAX® cameras), *I Frankenstein*, *Seventh Son*, *Robocop*, *300 Rise of an Empire*, *Godzilla*, *Transformers 4* and *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*.

– **Martie Bester**