

## **The Future of Radio: The Next phase Consultation Response**

**Respondent: Neil Kenlock**

**Organisation: Truebay Limited**

**Background: Media Veteran with a passion for the development of the Black community.**

- Photo editor on the staff of the West Indian World Newspaper, the first black newspaper in the UK in 1973;
- Freelance photographer;
- Co-founded Root Magazine, Britain's first glossy black publication, in 1979;
- Founder, shareholder and Director at Choice FM London;
- Directed the planning, launch, and set up of the successful bid for Choice 107.1 FM, North London in 1999;
- Successful bid for Choice FM Birmingham;
- Currently a media consultant working in West Africa;
- Recently exhibited photographic work at the Museum of London.

### **General response to Future of Radio: The next phase**

I am encouraged that OFCOM continues to successfully identify the challenges and opportunities that commercial broadcasters are facing. I would like to commend OFCOM on the tremendous amount of work and energy that has been put into the development and publication of *Future of Radio: the Next Phase*.

However, I believe OFCOM should have developed a more strategic approach to the needs and requirements of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) consumption of commercial radio within the *Future of Radio: The Next Phase document*. I am surprised that of the 250 pages, only a couple of paragraphs have been dedicated to the huge problem of illegal broadcasters, and why young African-Caribbeans tend to subscribe to this medium.

Radio ownership and programming do not mirror nor look like the changing face of Britain today. People from the Black communities have to search hard for programmes that satisfy their tastes. OFCOM needs to embrace diversity as a proactive concept for promoting more effective equal opportunities and diversity; regionally and locally. OFCOM should also engage more with the under served communities because the balance of probability is heavily weighted against black ownership and stations targeted at black listeners.

That said, I congratulate OFCOM on its successful development of Community Radio; they are needed. Apart from providing a route for enthusiasts and young

people to gain access in the broadcasting and communication industries, they also act as a window for local communities across the UK. In this regard, Community Radio is still struggling to work with the huge layers of regulation imposed by OFCOM. Given my vast experience in media in general, and in radio, in particular, it is my belief that the availability of Community Radio alone will not reduce the demand for Illegal Broadcasters.

My recommendation is that OFCOM should take the same approach of licensing African- Caribbean commercial radio stations as the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) took in 1990. The approach was undertaken via the incremental experiment vehicle to reduce the impact and influence of illegal broadcasters in our community.

The short-comings of the incremental experiment with regard to African- Caribbean commercial radio stations were identified as the lack of sustainable local revenue outside of Greater London. This resulted in their closure, which by default, re-opened the airwaves for Illegal broadcasting. The only exception is Choice Fm in London which proved hugely successful with black listeners until its programming was changed to target listeners within the 16-24 age bracket.

A more considered and robust approach by OFCOM, with the support of DCMS and DBER could enact a cohesive commercial analogue network to serve the unmet needs of the Black communities in the inner cities. The network of stations will not affect the existing commercial broadcasters in any real sense but could emulate content provided by Illegal broadcasting such as Reggae and Rhythm & Blues music, in addition to carrying sympathetic speech output to their communities. This is a way of capacity building and tapping into the passion, drive and determination of the African-Caribbean community. It will also help OFCOM achieve its objectives in a mutually beneficial way.

It is noted that in the OFCOM's Illegal broadcasting document issued in April 2007, section 6 "Next steps" there was mention of "looking forward to working with stakeholders to develop ideas. In particular, our work will consider possible spectrum and licensing options to combat illegal activities". Yet in the current paper, *the future of Radio*, OFCOM have only made mention of 'looking at legislation and how to utilise different pieces of existing legislation more effectively'. What then, has OFCOM undertaken to assure stakeholders and the Black Community that this issue is being embraced and dealt with to find a sustainable, real and lasting solution?

The energy expended into the issue of Illegal broadcasting did not deliver the expected output. There are no real solutions identified in the current document and neither is there any substantial evidence of OFCOM's undertaking of the promised consultation on this particular issue of illegal radio stations.

There is no doubt that Illegal broadcasters are dangerous -- they interfere with frequencies and potentially jeopardise emergency services and other users of the airwaves such as aircrafts, particular over South London. I support stronger enforcement, more arrest, more imprisonments, and larger fines to both operators and advertisers. This stance should be supported by investment in better human resources, funding, community capacity building and awareness.

A diversity and infrastructure development programme would enhance scoping exercise and enable informed assessments of the capacity needed in providing social gain and cohesiveness in broadcasting for the African- Caribbean community in Britain. OFCOM should strengthen broadcaster's development whilst representing individuals who are otherwise under-served by licensed radio. It should also provide opportunities for community development and take more action to provide real alternatives and solutions to our community.