

TV we got right

 By [Chris Brewer](#)

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There's one thing I've been meaning to write about for a long time - a very long time, in fact - and it has to do with an aspect of our broadcasting talents that I've neglected to thank. Yes, ultimately the SABC (who would have thought?)

When South Africa decided that the mini skirt (or the drought of public morals, for that matter) were not valid reasons for stalling any further (although I'm not so sure about the morality issue), we launched our own TV service.

I was rather fortunate at the time – I was working for Ogilvy and Barlowvision was one of my clients – so I had a television set in my office. This made me a bit of a king pin, actually – that coupled with the perks of my other clients – which were Stellenbosch Farmers' Winery (SFW) and Bols.

So my office had a sample of each wine and their competitors' products. I therefore had a magnificent stock of booze – which, I have to add, was all empty by the time I left to start my own agency.



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Anyway, the crowning glory was the TV set. No picture, mind you, but it was there and I could get the test signal. Many of my colleagues used to pop in just to look at the colour signal. What simple souls we were then (well, especially them).

Then the big day arrived and the first live tests were transmitted by the SABC (SAUK) on 5 May 1975.

My office was crowded and we all laughed at the pathetic attempts of whoever was handling the microphones and trying to read the cue cards (a bit like ANN7 when it launched – which hasn't improved all that much, by the way).

But we were a forgiving bunch and they tried hard, day after day, to get it right – and we all understood and applauded their attempts.

According to Google, the first **official** broadcast was made by Dorianne Berry and Heinrich Marnitz on 5 January 1976.

Initially, the TV service was funded entirely through a licence fee as in the United Kingdom, charged at R36, but on 1 January 1978 advertising was accepted and then revenues catapulted.

On 1 January 1982, two services were introduced, TV2 broadcasting in Zulu and Xhosa and TV3 broadcasting in Sotho and Tswana.

A third channel was introduced known as TSS, or Topsport Surplus, Topsport being the brand name for the SABC's sport coverage, the name of which was changed of course, but the SABC chiefs at the time realised they had to invest in training of staff – especially when it came to sports coverage.

I remember that the progress made by our cameramen was really, really impressive. And to this day, the professional camerawork continues to be the best. And by the best, I mean the very best – quite on par with anything the BBC could do, often better.

We were, all of us – the whole country – grateful and extremely impressed.

Then, last week, I watched the Ireland/SA rugby game and, although the game and result were appalling, what got me was the totally amateurish camerawork done by Irish TV. It was absolutely dreadful – embarrassing for everyone watching. In

fact I was, quite literally, squirming.

Just to make matters worse, France then beats us in getting the World Cup nomination! As one commentator said, the Irish, like the French, should have been denied the World Cup on the basis of their total inability to get angles and decent coverage – replaying action over and over and missing vital parts of the game.

In addition to the cameramen and their work, I'm inordinately impressed by most of our commentators. Especially with cricket. When I listen to the Aussies (and the Kiwis aren't much better) with their bias and often blatant rudeness and aggression, I really feel quite ill. They shouldn't be allowed to broadcast outside of Australia – or learn to simply shut up (Sheila).

Anyway, that's life I guess.

Nevertheless, South African broadcasters can hold their heads high (well, a few obvious ones shouldn't) because their work is magnificent.

And we all should remain extremely proud of that.

ABOUT CHRIS BREWER

Having joined the ad industry in London, Chris Brewer spent most of his career in media analysis and planning - but has performed just about every advertising task from Creative to Research. He's an honorary lifetime member of the Advertising Media Association and regularly advises agencies and clients regarding their media plan costs and strategies. He is also often asked to talk at industry functions. Email: chris@brewers.co.za. Twitter: [@brewersapps](https://twitter.com/brewersapps). Read his blog: www.brewersdroop.co.za

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