

Snakes and Ladders: The Cape Town TV Story

In 2004 the Arts and Media Access Centre (formerly CAP) approaches Workers' World Media Productions (WWMP), Bush Radio, CVET and Public Eye with a proposal to work together to set up a community TV channel in Cape Town.



A Steering Committee is established to drive the process which includes widespread civil society consultations to assess needs and gain community support for the channel.

The HSRC is commissioned to undertake research which results in the publishing of a book and a business plan is drawn-up.

In July 2006 182 civil society organisations come together at the founding AGM to launch the Cape Town Community TV collective aka CTV. The stated objectives are to "Provide access to channels of communication and information for the Cape Town community through the production and acquisition of relevant programming by and for the community" (Section 2, CTV Constitution)

In 2007 a core group of volunteers set-up a temporary base at Community House in the office of Workers' World Media Productions (WWMP) and work to secure funding and apply for a license.

In mid-2008 CTV secures a grant from the MDDA and a one-year community TV license from ICASA.



A staff of six people are appointed and the team move into a small office provided by AFDA in Observatory.

CTV launched on 1 September 2008 with the broadcast of a power point presentation. Within six months of going on-air CTV is broadcasting 24/7.

Community TV stations are obliged to pay commercial rates for signal distributions costs despite the provision in EC Act for Sentech to introduce a preferential tariff. On 28 September 2009 CTV falls into arrears and is disconnected for 10 days until we are able to raise sufficient funding to pay the arrears.

In November 2009 CTV marches on Parliament to demand that the tariffs be reduced or done away. In November 2011 ICASA holds a hearing on transmission tariffs and Sentech is instructed to reduce its tariffs from R67 000 per month to R40 000 per month.



In late 2010 CTV moves into its own premises into “The White House”, a beautiful Cape Dutch building situated in the heart of Observatory. Over the following two years CTV secures additional office space and expands the operation to include two TV studios.

In July 2011 ICASA turns down our request to renew CTV’s one-year license as a result of “lack of available frequency” due to the launch of the test phase of DTT. CTV kicks up a media storm and ICASA relents. In November 2011, ICASA issues 7-year class licenses to all community TV stations.



In March 2012 Sentech moves Cape Town TV from channel 38 to channel 67 of the UHF spectrum. Unbeknownst to CTV, this would require CTV’s 1,4 million viewers to invest in expensive, wide band aerials to pick up our signal. CTV’s viewership drops to zero overnight.

Within 6 months CTV’s viewership climbs back up to 500 000 where it flounders for two years while we put pressure on ICASA’s to move Mnet from channel 32 which we occupy from late 2013.

In October 2013 Cape Town TV launches on DStv which expands the channels reach and ultimately pushes CTV’s viewership up to 2,5 million monthly, cumulative viewers.

In September 2014 CTV enters into a partnership with Johannesburg-based advertising sales house and, as a result, advertising sales increased significantly.



In 2015 CTV secures funding from the Open Society Foundation to launch a daily news service which is still running today with support from the MDDA.

In 2016/7 we embark on a community-driven process to amend CTV’s license conditions. At the same time we apply for a renewal of our 7 year license. This is approved in September 2017.

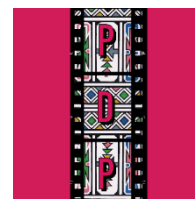
In 2016/7 the FCC relocates from AFDA campus to CTV’s studios and we install a fiber line. In 2017 Multichoice donates secondhand equipment to bolster CTV’s studio and control room and in 2017/8 donates a new playout system in the FCC. CTV start broadcasting on a 16/9 format.

In June 2018 CTV launches an NQF Level 4 Learnership in Film and Television Production with funding from the MICT Seta and trains 20 unemployed youth who work as studio crew.

In July 2018, CTV complies with onerous advertising industry standards and is listed on Telmar. CTV take over regional sales from Mediamark and beefs up the capacity to of the sales department.

In 2019 and again in 2020, Multichoice undertakes a major upgrade of CTV's studios and final control centre putting an end to CTV's ongoing technical challenges.

The Production Development Programme was launched in 2019 to formalize the channels commissioning processes through which members of the community are invited to partner with the channel to produce content that meets the needs of the community we serve. The PDP is aimed at identifying and developing individuals or organisations who wish to harness the powerful platform of television to drive positive social change.



In 2022 CTV moves over to Viacom who increase CTV's advertising revenue considerably which places the station on a more secure financial footing.

In 2020 CTV secures multi-year funding from the Ford Foundation for the work the channel is doing to advance the struggle against gender-based violence, in particular, The Womxn Show produced and presented by Lenina Rasool. This funding allows the channel to invest in marketing and other areas that have been neglected for many years due to underfunding.

In September 2021 CTV launched 6 online channels, making the channels content available on all devices, anywhere, anytime. This will ultimately grow to 9 channels as we expand our content offering. The channel can be found at **cape towntv.net**.

As we make the transition to digital we are determined to retain a bottom-up, participatory approach in terms of content creation. This initiated the rebranding and repositioning of CTV to "Cape Town TV" with the tagline "For You, By You", and a new logo, look and feel.

In 2022 the channel launched on Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) which will ultimately reach a provincial footprint of 4.5 million people. Cape Town TV is also available on the DTH "gap-filler" via Satellite with a footprint throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2022, free-to-air broadcasters were threatened by the switch-off of analogue television which would have affected 5.7 million households and resulted in the loss of up to 40 % of our viewers.

Through a combination of legal action, media coverage and a fierce advocacy campaign waged by the SaveFreeTV coalition we managed to delay the ASO until December 2024. Every effort is being made to ensure that low-income households have access to the set top boxes required to receive a digital signal before then.



In 2024 the channel will embark on a provincial roadshow with funding from USAASA to build the channel from the bottom-up throughout the province.

CTV currently employs 36 full time staff members, 23 interns and 35 freelancers.