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PlatformZA is Launched

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PlatformZA is an ambitious new just-launched digital pay-per-view media channel which was germinated during the first Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa.

A small subscription fee covers an amount of free content and the pay-per-view price varies for other material. It is a completely new concept for South Africa and the brainchild of Christiaan Ballot from technical supplier Blond Productions and production manager Pieter-Jan Kapp (Kappie) from PJK Project Management.

The two would usually be working together extensively during the arts festival season which has effectively been canned this year like almost every other 'live' event as the country fights the pandemic.

Like so many new Covid-era inspired projects ... PlatformZA started with a series of Zoom chats between connected industry people and influencers, during which, explains Christiaan, "It became very apparent that there was the need for a mechanism other than streaming to which artists and producers could bring their content."

He and Kappie – known for their can-do attitudes and seizing good opportunities – then hatched a plan!

With the whole industry being affected, they wanted to proactively offer artists like comedians, singer-songwriters and bands plus other performers and presenters working in all genres of visual entertainment – from vlogs to games shows to cooking demos – "the chance to produce high-quality new material cost-effectively with full and professional technical production facilities and crew," stated Christiaan, in addition to be able to host quality content that is made elsewhere.

To facilitate the former, they have transformed the Blond Productions warehouse in Midrand near Pretoria into a fully functional high production value pop-up recording studio, and to stimulate the latter he and Kappie energised their enormous and diverse client and contacts base.

With a large inventory of Robe moving lights in stock, the studios feature plenty of Robe products on the lighting rig.

The studio's goal is to be as adaptable and widely accessible for those wanting to use it. Flexible staging and a lighting design by Ryan Lombard – with 12 Robe ESPRITES providing all the front and key lighting – are included in the package together with audio, LED screens and video / media servers.

The six-camera system and PPU is supplied by Alfacam SA.

Additional Robe lighting includes LEDWash 300s for back washes, 12 x miniPointes for beams and effects and 24 x LEDBeam 100s which kick in for side light. Other specials can be added as required.

The Robe PATT 2013s are also a big hit, particularly with artists and singers wanting some scenic style back-of-camera props, while the raw warehouse backdrop brings a signature dash of edgy-industrial DIY style.

In addition to the studio shoots, the house team also works on location, with full technical packages to suit.

The studio has also been used for streaming since it was set up, but now with the added flexibility of pay-per-view access via PlatformZA, Christiaan and Kappie feel that artists, creatives and producers working in multiple different sectors have so much more scope to reach wider audiences.

There are currently four categories of content – music, stage, sitcom & comedy and lifestyle. Already, Platform ZA has over 2500 minutes of premium material available - a mix of footage produced in house and elsewhere, all of which will be available on the platform for periods of up to 3 months and sometimes longer.

Creating Platform ZA and recording the initial 'house' produced shows has provided work for over 200 technicians, camera operators, artists, etc ... which has been desperately needed since events and entertainment came to an abrupt halt in March.

The platform is designed to work on a revenue share basis, so everyone involved can benefit from more people viewing and enjoying the content.

“Quality is absolutely the key,” emphasises Christiaan, adding that artists are now starting to approach them to re-shoot homegrown content in the studio and have access to improved facilities. The aim is to grow the range of artists and dynamics of the material on offer in the process encouraging all involved to hit the ‘quality bar’ every time.

Christiaan thinks that Covid has effectively “flattened the playing field” in terms of creating a climate where a greater number of artists and producers could potentially have more and better chances to share their content with new audiences and demographics.

“The intention is to appeal to as diverse a spectrum of people, talent and entertainment as possible,” commented Kappie, as well as promoting a ‘house’ channel where “people can launch their own projects with very little resources and with assistance from our technical crews - from a cell phone movie to a stand-up comedy festival. We are providing a forum for engagement where they can get started.”

When festivals, concerts, tours, events, and live entertainment can and do re-start, Christiaan and Kappie see a healthy integration and many more possibilities for Platform ZA in that world, where they can continue the knowledge and resources exchange.

The overall Platform ZA vibe is very much collaborative, with music programmes like “Stroom” which brings artists together to perform two new songs and then spontaneously create a fresh new work with another artist. Fishing and cooking programmes are already proving popular, while cancelled 2020 arts festivals like Aardklop have utilised the studios to record and release new stage works that would otherwise have been scrapped altogether.

With numerous possibilities ahead, this enterprising and still embryonic venture has a huge amount of marketing activities ahead to get established – but the seeds are firmly sown and the interest is growing!

Photo Credit: Courtesy Blond Productions



