

Did you just say 'Quality Corporate Video?'

With increasingly decreasing budgets and deteriorating production values, it's hardly earth shattering news that standards are falling in the broadcast industry. Ever since the popularity of Big Brother, it seems our screens have been hit with an abundance of repetitive and unimaginatively formulaic programming. With the exception of the odd drama or wildlife documentary, primetime production techniques have begun to embody Theodore Adorno's notion of culture industry – rookie directors plucked out of university, handed DV cameras and a city centre location and told to make the next winning series of 'Drunk Glaswegian Housewives From Hell'. When they've finished filming, it's straight to shift-working editors sweating in production-line post-houses, waiting for the bell to sound so the next poor fellow can start his twelve hour stretch. Next stop your TV screen.

The reason for this? They do it because they can. Gone are the days when the BBC valued its social responsibility to deliver quality programming. Under much needed pressure for change, they have tried unsuccessfully to shed their patronisingly patriarchal image in favour of further demeaning the licence payer by commissioning pale copies of its competitors' crown jewels – think ITV's Pop Idol then try to remember BBC 1's Pop Stars – the list goes on.

Cross to the other side and the TV advertising industry still has the power to 'wow' with beautifully creative 35mm commercials. 'That Honda Ad' immediately springs to mind as a case in point, however, with the digitalization of television and subsequent audience diversification, circumstance has hit advertisers hard. Corporations are increasingly going for quick-fix solutions, spending on when and where their ads will play rather than what they look like. This has resulted in some of them going a bit 'corporate video' on us, commissioning the most basic commercials that are seemingly made with little or no consideration for 'the craft'.

Change is afoot and the industry knows it. It can be said with certainty that from this point onwards we will be consistently faced with an onslaught of new channels with a US-style broadcasting system looming ever closer. This will predominantly hit those production companies who have relied on delivering quality, big-budget commercials simply because, with the exception of major sporting events, more is less. With so much choice advertisers have a far less coherent idea of who will be watching what and when. So if TV advertising won't offer return on investment, where will those big marketing budgets be spent?

The internet and other interactive forms such as 3G mobile account for an ever increasing percentage of marketing budgets. For example, corporate giants McDonalds have slashed their marketing spend on TV ad campaigns in favour of more inventive interactive advertising platforms. Then again, the answer also appears to lie in improved corporate communications. Whilst the lower-end of the genre have cheerily embraced DV technology and continued to produce the type of corporate and training videos that we all know and love, a select number of larger agencies have channelled into this sea of change to offer high-end production services to the corporate heavyweights. More money is increasingly being spent to deliver slick, progressive and cleverly made corporate productions. As a result, 'corporate videos' are gradually transforming into 'corporate films', featuring many of the similarities associated with the 'blockbuster' commercials. From the clients' point of view, it makes perfect business sense to invest more of their marketing budget into product that is going to be delivered to an audience they know and understand, with economic rewards that far outweigh those of TV advertising. In short they have an eye fixed firmly on an immediate and attainable prize and know exactly who the audience will be and what is needed to engage them. Those companies who haven't caught on to the activities of their competitors are watching their carefully constructed Power Point presentations fall flat against dynamic, tailor-made promotional films. For Roger Price, Managing Director of I-MOTUS, a production company that has produced short films to support contract bids worth up to £1billion, the logic of this approach is self evident, "when companies are pitching for contracts worth hundreds of millions of pounds, it makes sense to allocate a decent budget to produce clever, engaging and well-made films tailored to an audience they know and understand".

When put like this, the appeal of pumping cash into developing primetime commercials for increasingly disparate viewers for significantly less potential return on investment, would appear to border on corporate madness. In short, digital television has undeniably created a nation of channel-hoppers. People are no longer expected to sit patiently through the ad break until their

favourite programme resumes and the money traditionally cast aside for that 'special' TV advertising campaign, is increasingly being placed elsewhere - notably into interactive mediums and sprucing up promos destined for corporate audiences. Orange has proven with the highly successful 'who's who' of Hollywood ad campaign, that cinema audiences are a shrewd target for big TV ads, however these are increasingly produced for such use, and made with less frequency than their made-for-TV counterparts. As for the Beeb, if it seriously plans to remain the only world-class publicly-owned broadcast corporation, which I sincerely hope it does, maybe it should take a look at the improving values of its humble corporate video cousin for an immediate wakeup call.

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Featured Interview:

Roger Price is the Managing Director of the production company 'I-MOTUS'. www.i-motus.com