Brand Funded Programming

Why It Matters Now

K7 MEDIA

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Exclusive Interviews with 26 Top Global Experts in Brand Funded Programming

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1. Introduction

Welcome to **K7's Insight Report - Brand Funded Programming: Why It Matters Now**

Amidst a sea of depressing news about stalled TV productions, squeezed programming budgets and diminished ad revenues in 2020, there is one area that is perhaps set to benefit more than any other from the year's upheavals - that of brand funded programming.

A timely convergence of these financial pressures, combined with the diminishing impact of traditional advertising spots in a world of proliferating VOD platforms, has led both broadcasters and brands to put renewed effort into finding new ways to co-fund and co-develop original, entertaining programming between them. Different territories are at different stages on this journey, with varying regulatory and audience constraints leading to a highly complex global picture, but if you haven't as yet taken the time to properly understand the opportunities, 2021 might be the time.

We interviewed 26 top industry experts involved in brand funded programming from around the world - from broadcasters to producers, agencies, brands, distributors and film-makers - to find out what they think those opportunities are, and how best to navigate them in a rapidly evolving, post-pandemic TV landscape.

The first half of our report summarises the key insights and tips we obtained - including what to call this style of programme making, which models of BFP are most successful, and how they are impacted by territory, platform, genre and audience differences. Our interviewees acknowledge the many challenges involved in successful BFP, but also offer up some advice on how to overcome them.

The second half of the report publishes those interviews in full, territory by territory, so that you can read more about individual case studies, and hear from those most relevant to you in more detail. As the year progresses we hope to add to these with further interviews, territories and examples, building the report further. **Please get in touch if you would like to tell us about a specific BFP case study you have been involved with, or have insights or interest in a specific territory or approach.**

As this area evolves rapidly, collective best practice from all parties involved can perhaps help to build some invaluable new financial and creative models for the future.

Authors

CLARE THOMPSON - Non-executive Director

Clare is Non-Exec Director at K7 Media, regularly writing and presenting on global content trends for their international broadcast and production clients, and at festivals around the world.

Alongside this she runs development and pitching workshops, team training sessions and channel/ commissioning strategy projects for clients including the BBC, Channel 4, ITV Studios (UK & US), Endemol Shine, All3Media and MTV, and for all the major Chinese broadcasters through the University of Westminster's China Media Centre. She consults on the development slates of several indies in France, Ireland, and London; and in Scotland via the Screen Scotland Focus scheme.

Clare's background is in entertainment and factual entertainment development: in-house at ITV from 2000 - 2008, she headed up their Entertainment Development team, steering work on international formats and returners like Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway, before moving over to run internal innovation unit Imagine. In recent years she has also Exec Produced documentaries including Girls With Autism (ITV) and Trafficked in Suburbia (YouTube's Real Stories channel).

VICTORIA DE KERDREL - Asia Pacific Consultant

Victoria has spent the past 10 years in Asia working on numerous co-production projects with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan, the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union and the National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia (FINAS). Previously, she worked for BBC Studios for 10 years in a number of key European roles including a stint in the Paris office where she ran the factual co-production business in France. She currently represents K7 Media in Singapore.

HANNAH BARNES - Australasian Consultant

Hannah joined K7 in June 2020 from Australian channel group Foxtel, where she was the Group General Manager for Foxtel's Lifestyle Group linear, SVOD, BVOD and digital platforms. With over 20 years' industry experience, Barnes has enjoyed an extensive career working across the UK, US, and Australian media markets, including time spent working for Sky and Channel 5 in London.

Alongside her main gig working for K7 Media Hannah's hands-on approach consulting with various production and media companies in Australia and NZ gives her an intimate perspective on the markets.

NIKI PAGE - Factual Consultant

With over 20 years' industry experience, Niki has held roles within Channel 4, Fremantle and spent six years as Head of Factual and Factual Entertainment Acquisitions at Sky Vision. Most recently, she was VP of Factual Acquisitions at Red Arrow Studios and managed non-scripted acquisitions outside of North America. At K7, Niki uses her extensive knowledge of non-scripted programming to help develop our insight at a time of great interest in this genre.

2. What Is It? And What Do We Call It?

One of the issues around 'brand funded content' is that there are myriad different forms of it, and just as many different terms for it. We'll come on to the different models later but, over the years, variations of the same thing – content that brands have wholly or partially funded – have been variously known as branded content, advertiser funded programming (AFP), branded entertainment and brand funded programming (BFP), amongst other things.

Broadly, all the terms refer to a type of programming where the advertiser pays to integrate their message in the TV programme itself, rather than just buying advertising space around it - something that has become increasingly appealing to brands, as viewers now have more and more opportunities to skip or avoid traditional ad spots. It can include product placement, sponsorship and licensing deals, but more recently it has come to encompass the actual creation and funding, or co-funding, of whole shows from scratch - the direction that we focus on in much of this report.

Paul Tremain
Head of Branded Entertainment
MediaCom

Many of our interviewees had strong feelings about what it should be called now, and why; but also why the terminology was moving on.

Paul Tremain is now known as Head of Branded Entertainment at MediaCom and he thinks the area was in need of a bit of reinvention.

"About 10 years ago brands got really excited about 'AFP' and the idea that they could buy their way onto TV. But they just ended up as expensive sponsorships that didn't really drive any ROI – shows with logos slapped on and a bit of product placement, that commissioners then buried. The term got a bit of a bad reputation and we stopped doing it."

Samantha Glynne
Global SVP Branded Entertainment
Fremantle

When MediaCom revived the department around five years ago, it became **Branded Entertainment,** and that – along with **Brand Funded Programming**, or **BFP** – seem to be the preferred terms for this new wave of practitioners. Samantha Glynne, Global Senior Vice President of Branded Entertainment, Fremantle explains how, for her and Fremantle, the 'entertainment' part is key:

"Branded entertainment is a piece of entertainment that people will seek out for entertainment, but that happens to be funded by a brand. Entertainment that they will watch, be absorbed by, share – and it's irrelevant that it's funded.

"I like to call it BFP (or brand-funded content) not AFP (advertiser-funded programming), as the term AFP already feels anachronistic! Now it's not just about advertisers paying money – there are hybrid co-developments, different finance models, sponsorship, 360 assets, co-productions, it's all much more fluid."

Cathy Boxall
Global SVP Branded Entertainment
The Story Lab

Cathy Boxall, Global SVP Branded Entertainment at The Story Lab, agrees.

"Branded Entertainment has to be entertaining! Audiences have to want to seek it out and engage with it – it's not an extended ad or sales message. It's a longer term play, that can also grow and build an audience over time, ideally over multiple series."

But as we'll hear in more depth, Tremain and Glynne are more concerned with the entertainment and factual entertainment end of the content spectrum – operating in bigger scale, often formatted, genres that fit the phrase. For some of our other interviewees, more concerned with brand-funded documentary and factual content, perhaps the catch-all **Brand Funded Programming** is more appropriate.

Either way, what our research and our interviewees have made clear, is that there is no single, one-size-fits-all approach, or probably even term. BFP is as rich, varied and influenced by territory, platform, audience, and producer as any other form of content.

Christian Murphy
Head of Enthusiast Brands
A+E Networks

As Christian Murphy Head of Enthusiast Brands at A+E Networks explains:

"I believe the definition of 'brand funded' programming has changed and will continue to change, it's not well understood right now, it's a very big, broad and expansive bucket that covers many different approaches and I do think there's not a great understanding of what it is and what it can be."

3. Why Do I Need to Know About It NOW?

Brand or advertiser funded programming is certainly nothing new. Although most markets, other than parts of Asia, now generally follow the model of commercial broadcasters funding shows, and then recouping the money from selling advertising, there have long been exceptions. The term soap opera is, of course, a reference to that fact that in the US and UK, the original soap operas were funded and produced by soap companies such as Procter & Gamble.

Sameer Gogate
Business Head
BBC Studios, India

In many parts of Asia, upfront brand investment is integral to getting shows made and on air, and that has been the model for some time.

Sameer Gogate, Business Head for BBC Studios, India, explains how, in India, brand funded programming is **a crucial part of the whole ecosystem**. Numerous shows have benefited from essential brand funding and have proved to be extremely successful for all stakeholders. *"**The House That Made Me**, produced with Asian Paints for multiple seasons and the award-winning series* **I Can You Can** *produced for a pharmaceutical company promoting Nicotex (NRT gum) are good examples."*

"The investment into the content paid off for both the brand and the broadcaster and the series were heavily promoted by both partners. When we look at content spends, we used to see brands as the extra pockets – the brand money that went straight to production."

I Can You Can

In other smaller markets, like Australia or Finland, it's **very difficult for the commercial networks to fund the biggest global formats without significant brand investment**, and that has always been the case. But increasingly, a number of factors are converging to make that investment even more appealing, and necessary, for brands and broadcasters across multiple territories.

On the brands side, advertising spots are delivering less return on investment than they used to, thanks to the many ways in which audiences can skip through or avoid them altogether. And for commercial broadcasters, successive waves of recession-hit ad spend have constrained budgets time and again.

Vaibhav Modi
Managing Director
Victor Tango

In our interview with the MD of Indian production company Victor Tango, Vaibhav Modi, he talks about how *"AFP is inevitable for brands – **advertising is dying and consumers are engaging with brands and programming in a very different way now**. As an example, the recent* Times of Music *format got a shot in the arm when Smule, the karaoke app, jumped on board before the show was completed and aired on MX Player. The brands really are the enabler and can provide critical funding to good ideas."*

The increasing multiplicity of platforms for which to make programming has also been a game-changer of late. *"There has definitely been a shift in the last 12 months and renewed interest. Digital has really freed up the landscape. If I have a great idea, I can reach out to a brand directly; co-creation is more possible today."*

While multiple sponsors have always put money into TV shows in Asian territories, there is also a recognition that this model isn't always ideal. Increasingly they are interested in exploring something **more bespoke**, that gives them a much greater 'share of voice' in the market than their competitors.

Urvashi Khanna
Head of Content
Lenskart

Urvashi Khanna, Head of Content at Lenskart, India told us that *"Slowly, the brands are realising however that the sponsorship models are very cluttered. They cannot afford an exclusive solo deal, so there are usually five-six brands on the same show and we are reaching the masses but not necessarily the audience we are targeting. If they need to express their brand creatively and exclusively, they need to go solo. With BFP, we curate content so that we are reaching a specific target audience. The brand's name and philosophy is integrated into the piece of content which is obviously not possible with the sponsorship model."*

And slowly attitudes are changing, even in well-established Asian BFP markets, towards a **subtler, more integrated approach to brand involvement in programming**. Says Khanna: *"Advertising for India is still quantified by the number of views whereas in other parts of the world, people really want to indulge with the brand in terms of the story. Storytelling is however picking up in India."*

Alex Bescoby
Filmmaker and
Managing Director
Grammar Productions

One of our case studies within the report is the Singapore Tourism Board's SG Stories Content Fund – set up to fund and facilitate numerous different international productions to feature and celebrate Singapore (another of our case studies – Alex Bescoby's The Last Overland – was coincidentally a project supported by the STB.)

They summed up the growing importance of this element: *"People do not remember facts, but they remember stories. Branded Content will continue to be an important component of STB's marketing strategy and execution as it enables us to establish deeper connections with our audience through unique stories that appeal to different interests."*

So, there were already plenty of reasons for BFP to be gaining in popularity as a funding model in the last couple of years. And then of course, the **COVID pandemic** struck. As stock markets crashed, businesses folded, and many brands were forced to slash their marketing budgets, traditional advertising spend has been squeezed. As just one example, in France, research published in autumn 2020 by the Kantar Institute, the Institute for Advertising Research and Studies (IREP), and the advertising research organisation France Pub, showed that the communication market, which includes media revenues, but also non-media revenues (direct marketing, events, PR), was expected to contract by 22% in 2020. With the same picture replicated across multiple territories, one might expect brand funded content to suffer as much or more.

The Last Overland

Sameer Gogate, Business Head for BBC Studios in India, is pessimistic about the impact. *"In this economy - COVID times - I don't see that extra pocket having left anything. Brands would rather spend on their standard channels and standard marketing plans. I don't see them going out to create extra noise around content. It's easier for the brands to put some money on an existing IP rather than creating a new property themselves."*

But according to many of our other interviewees, the reverse seems to be true. In the UK and parts of Europe, the fall-out of the pandemic appears to be turbo-charging a shift in attitudes that was already taking place and making brand funded content a necessity for many cash-strapped broadcasters.

Vicky Kell
BFP Consultant

We talked to Vicky Kell, a BFP consultant who specialises in helping broadcasters, brands and producers navigate brand funded programming. She recently put out a round-up of UK BFP in 2020 on LinkedIn and was surprised by the level of interest from the production sector - from smaller producers through to the bigger studios - from the UK and Denmark, South Africa, Brazil and beyond.

"This area was growing rapidly anyway, ***AND this year has had a big impact, not BECAUSE of what's happened this year****. Budgets are being squeezed all over, so broadcasters and producers are far more open to alternative sources of funding, and brands are looking for alternative ways of getting their message out."*

At creative agency MediaCom, Paul Tremain, Head of Branded Entertainment, confirms that, despite the challenges to production, the appetite is still very much there – from both brands and broadcasters.

"We've been quite lucky in that our big clients like Tesco and Lloyds Bank have spent well throughout, and we've been relatively unaffected. Last year we did seven BFPs, this year it will be three. One with Dell that will air next year, a reboot of **Changing Rooms** *with Dulux, and* **Celebs Go Virtual Dating** *with Wrigleys. We would have had more but there have been challenges to filming, to development, and also of course to budgets.*

"But of course that does present more opportunities as broadcasters need to look elsewhere for funding."

Celebs Go Virtual Dating

Simon Wells
Controller of Funded Content
Channel 4

Samantha Glynne, Global Senior Vice President of Branded Entertainment at Fremantle, told us that: *"The main commercial broadcasters in the UK are now increasingly saying – "We love the idea, but can you come back when you've found the money to fund or co-fund it?" And more and more producers are getting in touch with ideas for which they need to find a brand partner. Simon Wells at C4 is ringing me up regularly saying "We've got another one…"*

Simon Wells is the Controller of Funded Content at Channel 4, and the man who has perhaps been most responsible for changing the perception of BFP on mainstream UK channels of late. In his six years at Channel 4 that change has been slow but steady, until the sudden impact of 2020 altered everything.

"The last eight months has had a big effect in terms of accelerating branded entertainment. Because of COVID, alternative investment has become more of a financial imperative, but now the genie is out of the bottle it's not going to go back in."

In his longer interview with us he talks about how the golden age of advertising is waning – with the creativity and impact of 30 second spots no longer what they were.

"The explosion in channels, online video and on-demand affected the quality of ads, they became commoditised, less valuable, things you can just spin through. So now advertisers are looking for a better way to get audiences to FEEL something about them, and the planners and agencies are increasingly understanding the power of an emotional entertainment story on TV to do that."

The arrival of coronavirus threatened to derail all the hard work that had been done to get this year's complex co-funded projects off the ground. But it quickly became clear that they would be needed more than ever.

"At the start we spent the first 4-5 weeks working out which shows could still go ahead and which were going to be affected. Then as a channel we quickly came up with our approach to lockdown programming and briefed that out to clients and producers."

"We had a few branded lockdown shows, like TSB's **Britain's Unsung Heroes**, **Wrigley's Celebs Go Virtual Dating**, *and Erdinger's show on Jurgen Klopp. They did well with the audience, and internally, and with a significant sum being lost from the commissioning budget in 2020, the conversation quickly became about how we can bring more money in this way. Budgets will bounce back, but what has changed is that we have now opened the door to new types of effective ad funded Branded Entertainment partnerships."*

Britain's Unsung Heroes

"So the pandemic was a big kickstart, but I think the impact will last beyond it. If we can make shows that are ratings hits with brands, why shouldn't it continue afterwards? We've set up new working groups to look at it as a source of more revenue and investment in the future."

Cathy Boxall is Global SVP Branded Entertainment at The Story Lab, and works on the brands side of the business, helping global clients from ABI to Vodafone, Jaguar Land Rover and Kraft Heinz work out how to get the most out of co-creating and funding content.

She tells us that, *"By and large our global clients are doing well, and are positive about the future. They know they can't just sit on their hands, and our message has been that this is the time to strike, while the iron's hot. They realise they can't NOT do it, at this time when the appetite for brand funded entertainment is bigger than perhaps it's ever been. In the last six months we've had more clients than ever coming to us wanting to create high-quality, IP-led content, and what's great is that every day we have new, excellent examples to show them."*

But over and above just making brand funded content more necessary, the pandemic is also changing **which brands and categories stand to benefit** most from the massive shifts in consumer behaviour.

"COVID has changed so much – brands are looking at where they can get involved, particularly in sports content, which is doing very well on Netflix, Amazon, HBO Max, and again has partly replaced actual sports. The Jurgen Klopp documentary on Channel 4, funded by beer brand Erdinger, was a great example – it was already in the works, but with lockdown, sports off, and Liverpool winning the league, it was the perfect zeitgeisty show to take advantage of the situation."

Levison Wood
Filmmaker and Managing Director
Blackmane Media

Mike Connaghan
Managing Director of Commercial Content
News Corp Australia

Anita Godbeer
General Manager PR Social Content & Consumer Marketing
Tourism Australia

Travel is another obvious category that will need all the marketing power television can provide, to help it recover. In our report we also talk to two filmmaker/explorers, Alex Bescoby and Levison Wood – both heavily reliant on brands to get their expedition documentaries funded and supplied. Says Wood, *"In the aftermath of COVID 19 brands are going to be even more crucial to funding content. They have already been essential to my productions and expeditions. In particular tourist boards and other travel brands will be keen to invest in content now as they need to re-engage with people and get them to spend money."*

Mike Connaghan, Managing Director of Commercial Content for News Corp Australia, highlights the challenge here, saying that *"the travel industry isn't flush with funds and inventory right now, but probably has a willing audience who want to dream."*

Anita Godbeer, General Manager PR Social Content & Consumer Marketing, Tourism Australia, confirms this with a key point about the type of content they are working towards currently. "*Ultimately what we are striving for is long-term brand equity and emotional connection. And that emotional connection can be easier for a brand like Tourism Australia. What we want is for people to either act immediately or to provoke an emotional connection that resonates over time. I have heard stories of people reading a novel as a child that is about kangaroos, which then ignites a dream to travel to Australia as an adult. This year we haven't done a lot of traditional advertising because borders have closed. So, we have been focused on what we call "dreaming content" - something we've really leaned into, but which is still in development phase."*

Our interview with Singapore Tourism Board also highlights the opportunities within this category.

As the world begins to open up, series which combine travel and food will continue to appeal to brands who want the associations of global glamour, exploration and enjoyment - like Stella Artois, who have just commissioned Endemol Shine Brazil to produce a six-part food series about the restaurant scene in São Paulo. **Fora de Rota (Tr. Off the Beaten Track)** follows Brazilian chef Alex Atala as he explores the capital and will launch on Globo TV's streaming service GloboPlay as well as Stella Artois' YouTube channel.

Fora de Rota

The aftermath of COVID-19 is accelerating another trend integral to BFP – the importance of **brands telling a story about their wider contribution to society**. Again, certain categories or services lend themselves more readily to that. Says Samantha Glynne, Global Senior Vice President of Branded Entertainment at Fremantle: *"Content is a great way to highlight brand purpose – much more effective than a 30 second spot. So brands that have had a story to tell during COVID times, about their place in the community for example, can really benefit from branded entertainment now. That could be Unilever, P&G, Amazon, or other e-commerce brands."*

It's not just about commercial brands in this environment - with all sorts of new financial, health and issue-based challenges coming to the fore, there are opportunities here for **charities, government and public bodies to fund purposeful TV content too**. Says Mike Connaghan, Managing Director of Commercial Content at News Corp Australia, *"Health and wellbeing has become a bigger component for lifestyle genres. Government should also do better in their content creation and messaging. Governments in any normal year are the biggest advertiser. In a COVID year they are even bigger. Longer form integrated content is a great way to get a lot of information out there. It's really an untapped area for the government to use longer form content better."*

> "As for COVID protocol productions, for the short and long term, as producers, you need to be a tried and tested partner. The platforms need to trust the producers and the producers also need to trust the platforms to protect the IP that is brought to table."
>
> Donovan Chan and Phillson Rajan, Beach House Pictures

So the cloud of COVID certainly has its silver lining in terms of the opportunities for brands, producers and broadcasters to collaborate on the right projects. But the **even greater risks and mutual responsibilities** must not be overlooked. Even in normal times, a brand is entrusting its reputation and credibility to programme-makers with whom it decides to partner on a show. In current times even greater care must be taken – both logistically and creatively.

Donovan Chan
Creative Director
Beach House Pictures

Phillson Rajan
Head of Beach House Labs
Beach House Pictures

In our interview with Donovan Chan and Phillson Rajan, of Singapore-based production company Beach House Pictures, the pair highlight the high stakes on all sides – now more than ever.

"As for COVID protocol productions, for the short and long term, as producers, you need to be a tried and tested partner. The platforms need to trust the producers and the producers also need to trust the platforms to protect the IP that is brought to table. The platforms and the co-production partners need to know that as a producer, you are going to be a responsible entity when it comes to keeping people safe but also keeping the brand safe.

"Once you bring a brand in, you're not just protecting the IP of the show, but also the brand, which is entrusting you with its sponsorship dollars and the product and knows that you won't tarnish that by playing fast and loose with other things. This trust is so important moving forward."

Anthony Damianakis
Commercial Content Director
Boomtown Pictures

Overall there seems to be a real desire amongst our interviewees on all sides of the BFP equation to use this moment as **an opportunity to re-fashion the content funding models that currently exist**. As Anthony Damianakis, Commercial Content Director at Boomtown Pictures in Australia puts it: *"[BFP] is inevitable! But also important to financing shows is reimagining the current film and TV industry funding models, to encourage and understand the investment potential of brands, in distribution and elsewhere."*

"If we could bring together networks, brands and screen bodies (state and national) to the table, this could open up a new line of funding that further legitimises brand funded content as a means of driving production revenue, employment and creativity in Australia. The screen bodies have the opportunity to adapt their outdated finance modelling to assist in gap funding projects at scale."

In a territory with smaller budgets like Australia, these co-funding models have always been more of a necessity, but it's a need that's also being replicated far more widely right now.

> "[BFP] is inevitable! But also important to financing shows is reimagining the current film and TV industry funding models, to encourage and understand the investment potential of brands, in distribution and elsewhere."
>
> Anthony Damianakis, Commercial Content Director at Boomtown Pictures

4. BFP Models That Work

So which are the models that work best for brand funded programming? And which least well? In speaking to interviewees across the globe, numerous different approaches emerge, depending on territory, platform, audience and level of funding required. But if you're looking for a roadmap for your own set of circumstances, there are plenty of useful insights and pieces of advice to be found.

In China the highly commercialised model is very different from that in most of Europe and the US. Avery Yang, Marketing Director of Variety Programmes at streaming platform iQIYI explains how **in China shows can only *"be made with the support of brands and sponsors.*** *We usually launch a project once we have a brand behind the idea. This is the case for all streamers and linear TV stations in the unscripted space in China."*

"Mostly, the in-house producers come up with the idea and then invite the brands for a presentation. This is technically a sales pitch - the brands ask when the programme is going to air and most importantly which celebrities will be in the show – this is obviously key for them. That is the model that works for us and it boils down to iQIYI choosing which brand to work with given the fierce competition."

Youth With You

When a show is really popular – like iQIYI's talent show **Youth With You**, brands compete to be the main title sponsor, with others coming in behind, often up to 10 per show. In this sense ALL Chinese content is to some extent brand funded, but following a model closer to standard sponsorship than true BFP. However the difference with Western sponsorship is that the brands come in at the start of the process, before the show is made, rather than at the end, so can have some creative influence in exchange for their investment.

Deepak Dhar
CEO and Founder
Banijay Asia

Elsewhere in Asia, the models are more varied. Deepak Dhar, CEO and Founder of Banijay Asia talks about how all sorts of routes to air can follow, if one key ingredient is there. *"Rather than getting into the investment model, **it's all about the enthusiasm of the brand**; the minute the enthusiasm is there, some brands want to walk the full mile and really want to create content and own the IP and we then look out for a broadcast partner to come on board, some who just want to invest partially."*

Samantha Glynne, Global Senior Vice President of Branded Entertainment at Fremantle is much more specific about the **two to three models they pursue – as producers and distributors** - and the pluses and minuses of each.

*"Model one is where the producer starts with the show - as we did with **Supermarket Sweep**. We saw that Tesco were already doing their 'prices that take you back' campaign, so a retro show seemed perfect, and we pitched it to Tesco for ITV. We started off with the commissioning team at ITV who really wanted it if we could get the funding. Tesco then came in for around half the series budget. The ITV commercial team and the agency probably weren't that happy, as we had to move quickly without their initial involvement… but it all worked out well in the end as the first series was a great success. We went on to film series 2 with Tesco and everyone benefitted."*

Supermarket Sweep

"Model two is where the brand comes with a request to develop an idea for them around a certain theme or positioning. Sometimes you co-create with them, sometimes you might retool something you already have. What's useful is you have the brand's audience research, needs and data to build it around. Then it goes to the broadcaster."

"Both models can work but maybe the second can be more successful because the brand has bought in earlier. We would usually ask them for some development money up front to show their commitment. And then set up a framework which makes the roles of Fremantle, the production company, the agency and the brand very clear."

"There's a third model that programme finance funds from media agencies such as Publicis Apex, Omnicom and IPG Orion support, which is where they finance shows in exchange for unsold ad inventory, and generally don't ask for rights. Motion Content Group has a different way of doing things – they largely want rights, Exec fees, credits, distribution."

"We explored an additional model, where we partnered with creative agency BBH to develop ideas together. It worked really well in terms of bringing together their creatives and ours, discussing topical themes that the planners had come up with – fear of AI, sustainability, etc. – and coming up with ideas. Three of them made it to market, but in the end we suffered from the fact that BBH US has a select amount of clients, and while the synergy of co-producing ideas together was excellent, what we really needed were the right brands and their money on board. If I were doing it again I would do it with a bigger agency group, and committed clients on board from the start; and also a broadcaster bringing us specific genre and slot needs."

> "Rather than getting into the investment model, it's all about the enthusiasm of the brand; the minute the enthusiasm is there, some brands want to walk the full mile and really want to create content and own the IP…"
>
> Deepak Dhar, CEO and Founder of Banijay Asia

From the broadcasters's point of view, Channel 4's Simon Wells explains that they have no one set model – BFPs can come about in a number of ways.

"Probably the most common is that a client like Unilever, or an agency comes to us and says we've got a brief for brand X, who are looking for a show. We look at what we've got in development or been recently pitched that might fit, and we discuss it with them."

"Sometimes we might put the brief out to 5-6 select indies and put a shortlist of their ideas together."

"Sometimes producers come with an idea, and already have a discussion with a brand underway. We prefer them to come with something not too fully formed so that we can help shape, editorialise and craft it."

"And then also we send out a sales flyer every quarter with with some relevant and appropriate new shows that we're looking for funding partners for, to drive interest and partnerships."

From the agency side, there are also a variety of approaches. Paul Tremain's role at MediaCom is to partner their clients with entertainment properties that audiences want to spend time with – whether that be linear TV shows, talent/ influencers, or digital and social content.

"Our model now is a bit different to others in that we are very proactive with commissioners and producers. We want to know what they are developing and need funding for".

"That's a bit different to other agencies where they might get a brief from their client and then put it out to producers and channels to answer. But you can wait a long time to match a brand brief to a TV idea. Or you get a situation where – in trying to answer a brand brief – TV producers end up diluting their own specialism, compromising their skillset in making TV shows audiences want to watch, by trying to second guess what a brand might want. Often you just end up with an extended ad concept that way."

"And then the problem is you have to sell it in to the commissioners, and they might not want an idea like that. Much better is to ask commissioners or producers – what have you got that's 80% warm, but you just don't have the money for? Something audiences will want to spend time with that we can fit a brand around. And it helps to have an idea half-sold before we take it to a brand, otherwise it can get a bit awkward. I know of a sauce brand that got very excited about an idea recently and were ready to sign the cheque, but they can't get it commissioned."

"The model we've been pursuing is one where we then co-fund with the broadcast channel. This has worked well with Channel 4 as they really treat it as a partnership, and the shared ownership means everyone splits the risk and remains jointly invested in its success. It's in everyone's interest to protect the TX slot – no moving it to a graveyard slot – and work together to find the right slot for channel and brand."

"It works well for the channel because the brands can be a lever to helping them make the shows they want but can't afford; and for the brand because they can get more of their brand in, at a lower price point and with less risk."

> "In the UK the sweet spot for a brand to spend is probably around £500-750k. They can usually justify that and it's not too hard to find.
>
> Paul Tremain, Head of Branded Entertainment at MediaCom

This model is a real move on from the process Paul remembers from about ten years ago, when 'AFP' was really just another form of sponsorship, with logos and some product placement, and little enthusiasm from channel commissioners or schedulers who often ended up burying the results in unpopular late night slots.

"Now AFP has really moved on – broadcasters like Channel 4 are treating brands as real partners. It's no longer being run via someone on the commercial sales team trying to sell a sponsorship, it's now commissioners coming to us to work with them."

But over and above all this – and another reason why BFP is so much more valuable, measurable and appealing now – is **the explosion in social media.**

"That is now at such a scale, and such a major part of every plan, that there are so many more touch points and ways to activate a brand around the TV show – whether it be via the talent's profile, or events, or all sorts of other spin-off assets. They all work together to make a much bigger property. And of course they also make it much easier to measure the ROI."

Perhaps only relevant to UK producers, but very useful nonetheless, is Tremain's assessment of the **'funding sweet spot' for brand, broadcaster and producer to maximise that BFP return on investment.**

"In the UK the sweet spot for a brand to spend is probably around £500-750k. They can usually justify that and it's not too hard to find. What the channel and the producers need to understand is that it's important to leave enough in the pot for the brand to over-invest in all the activation around the show, as that will ultimately benefit everyone involved. If the show is well marketed and has profile, and if the brand can afford to spend on other paid media, 'first in break' spots and other promotion, it can lead to incrementals and spin-offs for the producer and will be for the wider good of the project."

"So it's worth being sensible about the level of investment, not greedy. Channel 4 will often come in at 50/50 on a project. With ITV you'd be lucky to get a co-funded show – generally they want the brand to pay most or all."

Lasse Nikkari
Head of Formats & Branded Entertainment (Nelonen)
Sanoma Media

In smaller markets shows have to be made on much tighter budgets, and brands will be much less willing to put such large amounts into untested formats. Lasse Nikkari joined Finland's Sanoma Media this year as Executive Producer (Branded Content) & Head of Formats for their Nelonen channel, his role has recently been enhanced to Head of Formats & Branded Entertainment. His model is straightforward, and about minimising risk for the brands, while giving his channel an advantage when it comes to delivering global entertainment hits.

*"Primarily my role will be about finding f**ormats that we want to make, and are proven to work, but that we need extra funding for.** We want to see those big, successful formats in weekly primetime slots but the size of our market dictates our budgets and many of the big international formats are difficult to make profitable in Finland. So partnering with a brand on them will hopefully mean we can deliver them, and give us that competitive edge."*

"What we look for is 'triple win' projects – ones that can bring ratings and grow our channel, help with brand building for the brand client, and can lead to a recommission for the producer, so they eventually make money out of it too."

In Singapore meanwhile, Donovan Chan and Phillson Rajan, at Beach House Pictures note *"one trend that we have noticed in the brand funded space is that **IP is being produced directly with the brand and together we seek out the platform**. This model has become increasingly popular."*

Hannes Jakobsen
CEO
DRIVE beta

Conversely in Germany, Hannes Jakobsen, CEO of DRIVE beta, Germany has ended up creating various educational channels on TikTok – initially funded as part of the #learningwithtiktok campaign and featuring young influencers, but now available for other brands, looking to reach those audiences, to fund.

*"Our experience is that brands want to speak to young audiences, but they don't want to take the risks that they need to to get that kind of content through the process, and to engage them. **Better to create the case first, start speaking to that audience and build a following, then you can go out and get more funding from brands who also want to reach the target group."***

5. Territory, Audience and Platform Differences

As we've already established, there is no single ideal partnership model for BFP, either in creative or funding terms, but that is further complicated internationally by the variations in territory regulation, audience tastes, and of course the multitude of different platforms now available.

Steven Murphy
Managing Director
Motion Content Group Asia

In our interview with Steven Murphy, MD of Motion Content Group Asia, he talks interestingly about how spend and the appetite for BFP is shifting between those platforms, but also between genres and different segments of the audience.

"On the one hand, spends are drifting to social media where brands are funding short form content. On the other, there are fewer global formats such as Got Talent, being rolled out. There are still some great formats to be had, but there is, as I have said, less money coming from brands to pay for these expensive programs."

For him, the **renewed interest in premium scripted content around the world is also making BFP a little more difficult.**

"Part of the decline in new global formats has been due to a global shift of focus to drama. The streamers, both local and global are helping to drive this trend but make no mistake, FTA prime time schedules across APAC are stacked with domestic drama. Drama is not the natural home for product integrations. Fewer opportunities to capture the larger audience exacerbates the situation that sees brands drifting to short form content online."

Some territories have big **challenges even within their own borders**, even before trying to consider international or regional BFP projects. Sameer Gogate, Business Head for BBC Studios in India, highlights the language hurdles that have had to be overcome for the sector to grow and target the right audiences there.

"In India, BFP has moved more into the regional markets. Previously, it was very much mainstream for the Hindi speaking audience. Now shows are being produced in Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Marathi languages enabling brands to penetrate the different states and target different pockets which is far more efficient. This is definitely something I've seen happening more in the past four years."

Samantha Glynne at Fremantle gives a brief overview of the **territory differences** in her interview, highlighting this greater prevalence in Asia (*"The first season of* **Asia's Got Talent** *was 80% funded by brands), Australia ("has plenty going on"*) and the split in the US between cable, where "*there's a fair amount of BFP"*, and network, where brands regularly sponsor shows but still rarely fully fund.

In Latin America, Brazil is particularly well-known for innovative branded content series, with companies like Endemol Shine Brazil producing shows such as **O Próximo Número 1 Villa Mix,** sponsored by AB Inbev, and P&G-sponsored **Cabelo Pantene – O Reality** for Pantene Brazil's YouTube channel.

O Próximo Número 1 Villa Mix

Europe is a mixed picture, with appetite certainly increasing in Germany according to both Samantha Glynne, and Hannes Jakobsen, CEO at DRIVE beta in Berlin.

The Nordics are relatively open to it, but it's Finland – known for its appetite for innovation, but also its small budgets, where there is perhaps most interest and need. Lasse Nikkari, Head of Formats & Branded Entertainment for Nelonen told us that:

"Both main commercial channels in Finland are doing branded entertainment, but we are the first to have an Exec Producer responsible for it, so we will do more, like Channel 4 in the UK. There is a general acceptance that these partnerships are worthwhile, based on previous cases. And the better case studies there are to point to - both in terms of ratings and brand messaging – the more other brands will be encouraged to try it."

While Samantha Glynne highlights Italy and Spain as being great for sponsorship and brand integration deals, but more difficult for BFP originals (**"the broadcasters often want the brands to spend up the same amount in media as on the programme budget"**), and France almost impossible, with little leeway for brands to feature in factual content due to legal compliance, Cathy Boxall at The Story Lab has a couple of examples where they have managed to make it work.

"Italy is fairly regulated, but we managed to do a travel show for Mediaset with Corona that was fully funded, but also well integrated, with the product [beer] featuring a fair amount, although not influencing the editorial. We also have Fastweb as a client there and they have done 5 seasons of a show called **Giu in 60 Secondi***."*

"In France it's generally accepted that you can't do anything, regulation around brand funding is so strict. But recently Belvoir whisky did a clever thing with Canal + where they funded a documentary all about French manufacturing. They only appeared in a small part of it, alongside various other French-made success stories, and had no editorial approval or input into it, and because there was no undue prominence, they got it through the regulator."

It is partly due to these regulatory differences that **international BFP projects** have proved to be such a challenge up until now. But some intrepid producers are taking them on – even between East and West.

Donovan Chan and Phillson Rajan at Beach House Pictures, Singapore, tell us in detail about their case study – the second season of Discovery's **Ed Stafford: First Man Out**, which was co-produced with

Chinese video sharing website Bilibili, and shot – as two separate versions - entirely in China. It won Best Branded Series at the Asian Academy Creative Awards.

"The reason we did two versions was that in China (with Bilibili as the partner), there was a brand funded approach to the production meaning that we had two main brands investing in the show: Chevy (Chevrolet) and also an outdoors brand called HX Outdoors. HX Outdoors were promoting a series of knives used for adventuring in China and Chevy was promoting a new four-wheel drive."

Ed Stafford: First Man Out

"For the international version with Discovery, Ofcom rules and other country regulations meant that there was no room for this type of branding discussion, so we were making an original series. The big challenge was to find room for both versions on the same shoot which was not easy but thankfully the language difference helped."

Most of our interviewees agreed that the difficulties of creating a BFP for more than one territory at the outset, make it rarely worth the effort. As Cathy Boxall at The Story Lab says: *"it's hard for global clients to develop or pitch one from scratch, with local teams and marketeers with different budgets and priorities. And if it's not for a global channel like Nat Geo or Discovery, they also have different broadcasters to pitch it to. Nat Geo and Discovery can seem like an easier one-stop solution for that reason, but to a local marketeer they often don't really provide the reach to make it worth a big chunk of their COVID-hit annual marketing budget. They will always prefer their big mainstream terrestrial channel. So one option we tend to recommend in that situation is to pick a strong lead market, do it there first, and then you can potentially take it on into other territories."*

Where the format is already known, there may be the eventual possibility of it travelling, with the same brand or a local equivalent attached, but it's not easy. Paul Tremain at MediaCom has some hopes for the reboot of home makeover show **Changing Rooms**, in the UK being funded by Dulux and Channel 4.

"Because **Changing Rooms** *is a well-known format, Shine is exploring the international potential but in general it's hard. The marketeers for a brand are different in every territory, so even with a global brand they all have different spend and priorities, and of course there are more broadcasters to convince. It could work more easily with a global streamer like Amazon or Netflix, but so far we're not seeing many of those opportunities. So generally my aim is to satisfy the UK brand divisions and broadcasters first, and the producers can try to get interest elsewhere."*

But there are other, less well-known shows that have done it. **All Star Driving School** was funded for 15 episodes on E4 by Suzuki – created to their brief, made by Rumpus Media – and is now running in six markets. But in Germany and Poland it's funded by Kia, and it's GM in Mexico. Suzuki got a share of the tape sales, and had a first option elsewhere, but other territories weren't a priority, so they were apparently happy for other brands to get involved.

Simon Wells at Channel 4 oversaw that show and would like to see regulation more aligned across territories to make projects like it a bit easier in future. In the global TV marketplace, the **patchwork of varied rules** is not helpful to the export of BFP formats.

"We may need some help from the regulators. Ofcom only allowed product placement ten years ago – we were one of the last countries to do this. We as an industry need to be putting the case to Ofcom that we need some flexibility, or at least clarity, with the undue prominence rules. There are lots of brands who have suffered because of COVID – car brands who have had all their live events cancelled for example. If they want a show about what they are doing around electric vehicles where do they go? Currently the SVoDs…there's some great examples already."

"We've done lots of shows like Inside Rolls Royce, Inside Liberty etc – we know those shows rate well – but the traditional model of we make and pay for the shows and they give us access is broken. We can't afford them anymore. But because of undue prominence we can't take their money for them either."

Jaguar: Going Electric

"So instead Jaguar can go to Amazon Prime and make **Going Electric** *for the US. It's a really good show, that is an excellent example of an editorialised product story told by the film maker/broadcaster. My argument would be if the viewer is notified through the current PP advice at the opening of a show then why couldn't this type of Branded Entertainment editorial be allowed?"*

And that brings us on to the final area in this section – **the attitude of the streaming platforms to BFP.** It hasn't escaped brands' notice that the younger audiences they often seek are spending more and more of their viewing time on platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime. And these are the very audiences that are most relaxed and open to brand funded content.

As Simon Wells says, ***"Younger audiences are definitely more open to it**. While older viewers grew up with blurred out logos, and brands just within ad breaks, the younger generation are used to the lines being much more blurred on social media and elsewhere."*

Avery Yang, Marketing Director of Variety Programmes at Chinese streamer iQIYI concurs. *"We see that brands are seeing the big shift to OTTs and are following the younger audiences. They are willing to support content on streaming platforms and tap into a larger, younger audience."*

While it's true that the likes of Netflix and Amazon are so far not bound by the same regulatory framework as domestic broadcasters, and therefore more able to experiment with global BFP if they wanted to (as in Wells' Jaguar example), there is so far little incentive for them to do so.

Cathy Boxall at The Story Lab is particularly articulate on the contradictions at play here. *"The thing that all of the brands want now – since their Execs all spent lockdown sat at home watching Netflix! – is to get onto streaming platforms. They've realised that that's where their audiences are going now, and it's driving them crazy that they can't access them. Their normal models of media buys, or paid content just don't work on the streamers."*

> "We see that brands are seeing the big shift to OTTs and are following the younger audiences. They are willing to support content on streaming platforms and tap into a larger, younger audience."
>
> Avery Yang, Marketing Director of Variety Programmes at iQIYI

As she points out, right now Netflix and Amazon don't really need the brands' money – or not enough to cede any creative control. And for brands *"it would be very brave to spend a good chunk of your year's marketing budget with a platform who won't tell you who watched it, for how long, or give you any other kind of metric to measure your ROI against. It might be great for kudos, but most of these companies are very ROI-driven, so it's a bit of a gamble."*

"But maybe this will all change and the streaming platforms will come round to some kind of brand-funded model. COVID has had such an impact on broadcasters this year…. so maybe some of the streamers will eventually come round too. Amazon are gradually trying to pull all those strings together – e-commerce, brands, fashion, sport – that it may happen with them sooner. And when Amazon Originals do start to take advantage of their position in the market, the other broadcasters could well be in trouble as there is so much more they can do – they certainly aren't currently governed by broadcast codes in the same way."

For those brands and producers looking to engage in BFP with 'the streamers' as they are often lumped together and termed, these distinctions could be key. In reality it probably will be Amazon (and perhaps other vertically integrated commerce and media platforms, primarily in China), that are the ones with the real incentive for this area. The data Amazon holds and the tactics it can deploy to push consumers further into its e-commerce environment are surely an unrivalled combination for brand funded content - If its current silos can be harnessed to work together in the service of that ambition.

6. Genres to Consider

When producers, broadcasters and brands are considering getting into BFP, one of the biggest considerations is **what genres are best suited to the model**. Of course that will partly depend on the brand, but it seems that more genres than ever are opening up as possibilities.

Simon Wells, Controller of Funded Content at Channel 4, identifies a major recent shift in which slots and what types of show can now be for BFP on his channel.

"When I started at Channel 4 six years ago the commissioners certainly saw it as a bit of a labour. AFP was generally for daytime or late-night slots where it would fill the schedule without damaging share."

"Now we're disappointed if we don't manage to get them into peak. They rate well, and the more of them there are, the more clients see good examples and say 'that's what I want!"

"There's a new generation of commissioners coming through who don't think it risks compromising the editorial, as long as it's done well and everyone is clear from the start about what their objectives are. It's now much more of a collaboration with them from the start, and Ian Katz has encouraged the commissioning team to embrace that."

Vicky Kell, BFP consultant, agrees that for the UK this is certainly true. *"What's changed a lot is the types of genres and day-parts we're seeing BFP in now. In the UK it used to be a bit of late night music, early morning sport, some weekend food programming and that was pretty much it. But in the last few years there's been a real diversification of genres – like the Lloyds Bank show -* **Save Well Spend Better** *- on personal finance or* **Kevin McCloud's Rough Guide to the Future** *with Vodafone; but also a move into peak slots, which of course really helps the ROI for brands."*

The other question is whether it's safer, and just as effective, for brands to go for **a one-off only, or to take the gamble on a bigger format or series.**

Save Well Spend Better

Hair Power: Me and My Afro

Says Kell, *"There's also been a real growth in one-off docs for the terrestrials. Waitrose did* **A Year on the Farm** *for ITV; and Dove was behind* **Me and My Afro Hair** *for Channel 4. There was* **Britain's Unsung Heroes** *from TSB, and then a Jurgen Klopp documentary from Erdinger."*

"You might assume that the brands would all want returning series, but actually the one-off doc is lower cost, lower risk, and can still have lots of long-lasting activations off the back of it. When brand priorities and personnel can change it can be a big gamble to try to make content that the broadcaster AND the brand will want to keep bringing back. Will it keep working for both? There are lots of stakeholders to keep happy."

Cathy Boxall at The Story Lab finds the same is mostly true for the global brands they work with. *"Most of the clients we deal with want to do the high-end documentaries, with top talent and purpose-led stories that work for their brand. A few are interested in factual entertainment, but mostly it's documentary one-offs or series."*

"We've had a couple of briefs for returnable series, and some brands are realising that those can be more monetisable further down the line, but it's still rarer."

Perhaps this also speaks to Samantha Glynne's earlier point about how – now more than ever – brands want the content they fund to **tell a bigger story about their purpose** or benefit to society: an area that lends itself more easily to documentary.

Taus Abildgaard
COO and Founder
Drive Studios

Taus Abildgaard COO and founder of Drive Studios, Denmark explains how this is behind the recent strategic shift for their company to more journalistic storytelling for brands.

"It feels like we are entering a new era for brands – thanks to everything from Black Lives Matter, to coronavirus, to Brexit, to the environment – where they need more than ever to 'do' real purpose, to take a perspective or make a difference. And they need TV-style producers and storytellers to help them do that. The audience are so wise to these brand messages now – the stories need to feel true, real and journalistically told to be believed."

For documentary filmmakers and explorers like Alex Bescoby, it's the authenticity of the types of personal mission he goes on that most appeal to brands.

"For me it's crucial, but you need to start with the story first - as a documentary maker you need to feel comfortable with the story and a story that excites you. This feeds through to the brands and gives them confidence in their investment…. As a filmmaker you don't want to shoehorn a brand that doesn't fit with the story, you want the story to have real heart and substance and then partner with brands who give you the freedom to tell it."

Unsurprisingly it's also themes of **nature, survival and the environment** that are at the heart of many of the purpose-driven documentaries brands want to represent them: stories that showcase endeavour, beautiful locations, and maybe what they are doing to help protect them.

Sameer Gogate at BBC Studios in India says that *"at the moment we have a lot of interest from brands in the eco, preservation, nature space. Outdoor gear and eco-conscious brands are keen to invest in BFP on the preservation of the environment, with a focus on climate and nature."*

> "COVID has opened up a whole new opportunity for 'feel good' and inspirational stories that have been born out of being at home with our families"
>
> Anthony Damianakis, Commercial Content Director at Boomtown Pictures

Beach House Pictures' ***Ed Stafford: First Man Out***, *was "the first survival series to air in China and therefore the first branded survival series to be pushed out into this territory. We proved that survival shows do work in China and we proved that branded survival shows also work there."*

In Australia, Anthony Damianakis also highlights the genres and brand categories that are benefitting from the current climate. *"It's really lifestyle, ob-docs and reality, and in particular 'feel good' formats. In a post pandemic environment they are attracting brand attention as they provide a storytelling platform that is safe for a brand to start a conversation around."*

"COVID has opened up a whole new opportunity for 'feel good' and inspirational stories that have been born out of being at home with our families. Homeware brands, retail, food, domestic travel, art and craft as well as technology brands have all been some of the benefactors of this environment, which has brought us all together to value family and friends who are close to us."

Interestingly, there's also differentiation emerging around **which platforms are best for brands to use to showcase their purpose-driven content**. In the UK a recent report from regulator Ofcom expressed the desire for streaming platforms to become part of the 'public service media' landscape, rather than leaving all the PSB remit to traditional broadcasters. And because it is younger audiences who may be in most of need of some aspects of PSB, Ofcom's Chief Executive Melanie Dawes refers specifically to "smaller players, or smartphone-based platforms like TikTok, which could provide new routes to public service media' over and above "your Amazons and Netflixes." Our interviewee from DRIVE beta in Germany,

Hannes Jakobsen, talks about the five channels they produced as part of a Learning with TikTok initiative – informational content around sexual health, science, activism, space and sustainability - that should now attract funding from youth-orientated brands.

Elsewhere there is clear appeal in lifestyle programming for the right brands, and there are those still pushing for the holy grail of the **branded global entertainment format.**

As the producers of global entertainment formats like **Got Talent** and **X Factor**, that is clearly of interest to Samantha Glynne, Global Senior Vice President of Branded Entertainment at Fremantle. She thinks the likelihood is increasing.

"In 2017, [When Sam contributed to a book about Branded Entertainment prize-winners at Cannes Lions] it was all about creating hype and PR around big, blue-chip films that could get picked up by the streamers. 5B, about the nurses on an AIDS ward in the 1980s, from Johnson & Johnson, or Unilever's Dads which went to Apple TV, etc."

"But the challenge now is to develop ideas that are scaleable and returnable. Formats that can get critical acclaim and audiences, but crucially also return."

Those might be entertainment shows – like **Supermarket Sweep** – or they might be factual entertainment and lifestyle series, like **Changing Rooms**. What's notable is that in both those cases, brands are attaching themselves to heritage formats, rather than creating them from the ground up, but perhaps that will change.

For Paul Tremain at MediaCom, their biggest areas of success are *"in factual entertainment, lifestyle and light entertainment. Those areas lend themselves most readily to specialist content. Scripted is much harder and the lead times are so long. Music was once popular but became too crowded and is now very limited on TV."*

Working the Room

A+E Networks in the US are similarly pursuing the **branded lifestyle programming** strategy – creating a portfolio of 'enthusiast brands' focused on the home, auto and outdoors spaces. As Christian Murphy Head of Enthusiast Brands, A+E Networks explains, *"These are ready built brand platforms that provide a safe environment for shows in those genres to have success."* So for example in A&E's Home.Made block

sit shows like FYI's **Working the Room** (a co-production with the media agency APEX and Sotheby's Home) and all sorts of spin-off tips and projects content; while the Drive hub has a mix of new car shows, archive series and short form content around 'car care' and 'the hunt for rides'.

"The most important thing is that our programming or content is 'brand friendly'. Then what we offer is excellent MRI data, different tools and products for brands beyond just the linear program and we create blocks around the enthusiast brands. We can then create short form content for brands with tips and tricks that are engaging and add something extra for the audience."

At Banijay Asia meanwhile, CEO and Founder Deepak Dhar is keen to play into the perennially popular drama space and work out a model for seamlessly integrating brands there. *"The idea is to move into scripted, where the brand is going to be very organic and key to the storyline. A lot of these ideas have already been seeded in the last year - we're itching to get into production but obviously plans have been delayed a little and we're looking at Q1 2021".*

As previously mentioned, brand funded scripted does present more challenges, but perhaps there are other areas to look at here. In Finland Lasse Nikkari, Head of Formats & Branded Entertainment, would love to be able to experiment with unexpected genres.

"I'd like to explore different genres in time. I think procedural comedy could work well for brand marketing with the right partner."

> "It feels like we are entering a new era for brands – thanks to everything from Black Lives Matter, to coronavirus, to Brexit, to the environment – where they need more than ever to 'do' real purpose, to take a perspective or make a difference. And they need TV-style producers and storytellers to help them do that.
>
> Taus Abildgaard, COO and Founder at Drive Studios

7. The Challenges

Despite all the benefits, the opportunities and of course the money, there is no getting away from the fact that getting a Brand Funded Programme away comes with all sorts of added layers of complication that some producers just may not feel equipped for.

Our interviewees talk in some detail about those challenges, but with some useful pointers on how best to deal with them.

One that we've already touched on is of course **compliance** – how to be sufficiently up on all the regulatory issues in your territory to ensure that your project can actually air.

Vicky Kell, BFP consultant, is currently facing this, as she works on a documentary *"with a brand attached that we think we won't be able to make because of compliance."*

She also mentions **scheduling**, and the pitfalls of getting a brand to commit time and money to a production, only to have the channel move its TX at the last minute. *"C4 have built the relationship with their schedulers so that they understand that if you move something – either in terms of date or day-part – it can have a huge impact on the brand's ROI. Other broadcasters are still catching up when it comes to that – they either don't get it or they don't care as much. But that is changing – there is growth in this area, and they can't be seen to be lagging behind or the deals will go elsewhere."*

But broadly the biggest challenge almost every interviewee, including Kell, identified, is that of managing the **greater number of stakeholders involved.**

Sameer Gogate at BBC Studios Production, India sums it up nicely: *"The beauty of the classic model is that it's just the platform and the producer with one or two visions at the most. The producer pitches his/her idea to the platform and the parties agree."*

"In the brand funded model, the value chain is slightly longer with the brands, agencies, channels and a producer, and it becomes at times difficult to manage everyone's expectations."

Vaibhav Modi, MD of Victor Tango, also in India, agrees, but for him the most difficult element of the chain is going through the agency. *"The biggest obstacle is the process that is routed through **the brand agencies**. The content studios bring the brand, the media/platform and the production company under one roof. The content studios are paid by the brand and are therefore overprotective of the brand's interests and getting six stakeholders (brand, brand's creative agency, the brand's media agency, the platform's ad sales team, the agency and the production company) aligned is challenging. It's more of a wedding than anything else! The brand spend amount is always proportionate to the direct ROI they can get out of the project, so capturing the essence of the brand is sometimes detrimental to the creative storytelling."*

But many of our other interviewees (and not just those from the agencies!) disagree, seeing them as a vital part of managing the process. Vicky Kell explains how *"it can work in all sorts of different ways, but a good media agency can really help…… It really pays to have everyone bought in early on - there can*

be so many stakeholders, it's important that everyone's on board and understands the process from the outset."

"A good agency can also really get the ROI to stack up for the brand and that is vital. They will be measuring anything that can be measured – press, social media interaction, ratings, brand awareness, product sales or enquiries."

Samantha Glynne at Fremantle has a similar view about the value agencies bring. *"It is great to have the creative agency involved as they can push the brands, make them more daring, and then create all the other assets that surround and support the show – that's where the value lies, and the agencies also have the audience insights to focus those. That's still where traditional TV falls down, and where data-driven companies like Netflix will fill the gap."*

Paul Tremain, Head of Branded Entertainment at one of the biggest agencies – MediaCom – is very clear about the central role they can play throughout in keeping the brand on board, and everyone on track.

> "In the brand funded model, the value chain is slightly longer with the brands, agencies, channels and a producer, and it becomes at times difficult to manage everyone's expectations."
>
> Sameer Gogate, BBC Studios Production, India

"We set the parameters at the start so everyone understands why they are doing it, what they are expecting, and what the challenges might be. The last 16-17 projects we've done have all been a success – they all had turbulence along the way for sure, but you get there in the end. You have to reassure them [the brand] that it won't be easy, it's not like a traditional media buy, but we can help with production management and liaising with their other agencies and the producers. That's particularly key when you are needing quick sign-off on assets or materials for example."

"Bringing the producers into conversation with the client is key, and sometimes the commissioners too, but it needs to be done at the right time. Generally MediaCom will sell an idea into the brand client, and try to get some indicative sign-off, before getting the producer and commissioner in to get it over the line. It can be worth getting everyone together for creative conversations early on, but you don't want to waste everyone's time until it's concrete. Above all everyone has to feel it's a partnership, not a land grab."

Simon Wells, Controller of Funded Content at Channel 4, agrees. *"You have to think of it more like a co-pro; there are lots of stakeholders, you have to listen to both sides, you have to be collaborative, and you have to be very clear about expectations and responsibilities up front."*

Wells goes on to talk about the other difficult aspect to dealing with those stakeholders – that of **managing the brands' expectations. The level of product or overt brand references in a BFP is governed not only by local regulatory guidelines, but also by the audience's willingness to accept it. And this is different in different cultures, different age groups, different genres, and on different platforms, as we've previously identified.**

Says Wells *"Our research team did a big report on audience reaction to branded entertainment and they identified this issue of 'Persuasion Knowledge'. It's like wandering past a shop and thinking 'that looks nice, I'll have a look inside', but then you get in and a shop assistant keeps following you around saying "can I help you?" The experience changes from something nice you've chosen to someone actively trying to sell you something."*

In the UK, there is still a great aversion to being too overtly 'sold to' – even TV pitch meetings are generally framed much more as 'chats about ideas' than the equivalent US sales meeting for example. So a brand message in a British BFP has to be very subtle.

In Asia, the general consensus is that the audience is much more used to overt brand presence, and more accepting. But here too, there is recognition that there are clever and more engaging ways to do it, if the brand can be persuaded to buy into them.

Says Avery Yang, Marketing Director of Variety Programmes at Chinese VOD iQIYI: *"Ultimately the producer is responsible for the show and our brands trust us. We offer a fully integrated branded campaign and sometimes brands might have their own idea for the show and revert back to the traditional way of placing products. On occasion we have to discuss the best way forward and there is a little reluctance sometimes as this is a new approach, but the process is mostly peaceful, they trust us."*

Talking about the integrations on their talent show **Youth With You**, for example, she explains: *"With QR codes on milk cartons and billboards, we are constantly catching people and enticing them to take out their phones and scan back to the contestant's page and watch the latest show and vote for their favourite celebrity or contestant."*

Street Dance of China

As Chinese television evolves, the types of brand, the genres they support, and the ways in which they get involved are evolving too. In 2020 Burberry became the first luxury brand to partner with a reality show, choosing to become the headline sponsor for **Street Dance of China (这!就是街舞)**, exploiting all sorts of opportunities including a free gift of teddy bear and **Street Dance** souvenirs with the purchase of Burberry products, as well as a livestream featuring contestants from the show to give fans the chance to buy exclusive street style products.

The new Chinese craze for fashion and street style reality contests is providing all sorts of opportunities for upmarket sell-through like this - iQIYI's original trendy reality show **Fourtry (潮流合伙人)** has brands like Gucci, Gentle Monster and Fendi in the show's celebrity-run pop-up store in Tokyo - mostly available for purchase via e-commerce platform and show sponsor Aomygod and IP co-op partner FARFETCH.

But keeping the brands engaged, confident and reassured about how their money is being spent, or their products featured, is a **time-consuming business** – particularly for the filmmaker/ explorers we interviewed who seem to be doing it all themselves.

Alex Bescoby, filmmaker and MD of Grammar Productions talks about the extra level of work involved in wrangling all those brands who contributed to his journey*. "Keeping brand expectations aligned and ensuring commitments could be adapted in line with the fluid nature of an expedition were my main concern. I spent a lot of time on the trip communicating with the senior teams at these companies, keeping them updated on what we were doing and reassuring them on the return on their investment."*

Levison Wood, writer, explorer, photographer and co-founder of Blackmane Media, concurs: *"Working with brands is incredibly time consuming. I would suggest to small production companies planning on working with them to collaborate with an agent who has the correct contacts at the companies or spend a lot of time building strong relationships with key brand managers."*

But of course, it's just as time-consuming for the brands themselves, and that can also be barrier to involvement on their side.

As Samantha Glynne, Global Senior Vice President of Branded Entertainment at Fremantle explains: *"It can take a long time to develop a BFP project – 12-18 months - and that costs so much for a brand. Marketing directors are often changing, so halfway through they may decide it's no longer their strategy, or not their project, or not a spending priority".*

But some have taken steps to lift their BFP strategy to a higher level, to protect it from the short-term pressures and changes at individual marketing director level.

"Unilever have done it well – bringing in Kelly Mullen to head up Unilever Entertainment, so she can go direct to the different brands like Dove, and encourage them to pursue these projects longer-term."

Lastly there is the **difficulty in measuring the success of a BFP**, when all the stakeholders involved have a slightly different view of what it should constitute. As Phil Smith, CEO of Great Southern Pictures in New Zealand puts it: *"There is an ongoing debate between agencies, brands, networks, and producers about proof of performance and the value you attach to that. We are still not there in articulating and agreeing what the metric is. It should be about brand experience and the whole ecosystem, however agencies just want to attribute a brand value."*

In the end *"the sweet spot is when everyone is happy. The producer makes a profit, the brand conveys a great brand experience, and the network sees good ratings and drives revenue or subscriptions."* A sweet spot that is probably easy to articulate and celebrate when all those metrics have been achieved, but more complicated when the various stakeholders' goals are either misaligned, or not met to an equal degree.

8. Top Tips for TV Producers

So lastly, a few tips from our interviewees on how to overcome some of these obstacles – tips aimed particularly at TV producers who may be considering entering the area of BFP for the first time. Because there are plenty of opportunities out there for those willing to give it a try.

As BFP consultant Vicky Kell explains, *"Smaller indies ARE doing this now. [In the UK] this year there have been about 20 ad funded commissions – around 50% were from big groups like All3Media, Fremantle, ITV Studios, but the other 50% were mostly from indies. No single producer dominates this space here."*

One theme that came through time and again, was around using your existing experience in creating content or entertainment audiences want to spend time with – rather than trying to second-guess what brands want or be something you're not.

As Jes Brandhøj, Head of International & Sales at Drive Studios in Denmark puts it: *"From our experience - figure out who you are and what your expertise is. Ad agencies know how to talk process and strategy, but TV production is a different game – play to your strengths in helping them tell a story. And then find the best partners – whether that's social media experts or distributors, to get it out there."*

Paul Tremain, Head of Branded Entertainment at one of those agencies, MediaCom, agrees. *"They [TV producers] need to stay true to what THEY do best – making entertainment that audiences want to come to. Stay flexible and come with an open mind, but don't dilute your expertise or what you do."*

Cathy Boxall at The Story Lab is even more direct about what TV producers are bringing to the party, and how valuable their skills are, but also what is involved.

"Producers need to realise, although THEY are the ones with the power - because they are the ones who can knock on the door at Netflix and get an idea away - it's not that simple when it comes to creating entertainment with brands. You need to learn how to pitch to them, how to address their challenges and how to speak to them – and that's quite different to pitching to commissioners. Brands are used to working with agencies where they have long-standing relationships and are used to having complete creative control and control of their message. To spend time and money creating long-form entertainment projects together, they really need to trust you… And it's important to understand that the model is different now – the brands aren't just coming with a big bag of money. They want rights, and a share of what they've helped fund and create."

"With that in mind we are also starting to suggest to brands that if they find a producer they trust, then it might be worth investing in some development funding so that both sides are bought in and have a position in the show from the start."

And it might be worth **finding someone who can help you navigate these kinds of partnerships,** at least at the start.

Samantha Glynne is in-house at Fremantle to do all the heavy lifting on these projects, but as she advises, *"Smaller indies probably should get someone to help them. It's very complicated if you don't keep an eye on it properly – bits of IP flying around all over the place. You need someone to manage the brand, explain why their product can't be in it 25 times; but also to deal with the broadcaster's commercial team. Those people might seem expensive to hire, but there are consultants around, like Vicky Kell, who has done webinars on LinkedIn and gives good advice to indies."*

Eventually Samantha hopes that everyone can be upskilled in what it takes to make a successful BFP: *"The stakeholders and creators need to be both educated and incentivised to get to grips with this area – from Production Managers to Development Producers to legal teams."*

In the meantime, that person to hold your hand through it, and take off some of the pressure of the stakeholder management, can be invaluable. As Vicky Kell warns:

"My biggest piece of advice to producers would be don't underestimate the time and resource it requires! Some producers have tried it, realised how much time it takes to develop the idea, have the conversations with the brand and the broadcaster and get all the planets to align, and then give up because it's too hard."

"And even when you get it away the resource required in handling the client through the process, and at the post-production end can be immense. Particularly with the non-broadcast assets that brands require - sometimes the agency will handle that but generally it needs the production company to oversee them. For example on Berocca's **Extreme Everest** *show, they had to do all the VR and AR for in-store promotions too. It's another entire workflow for the producers, and it needs to be done carefully to make sure it's all complementary to the main show."*

The person who manages that might be a bought-in consultant, like Vicky, but if not it really needs to be owned by someone in the company, with the time, support and skills to make it all happen.

Taus Abildgaard, COO of Drive Studios, Denmark has one last tip on that: *"When you do deal with brands, be prepared for it to be very complex. And for* ***the amount of polish, presentations and people to go up****. In TV we have a development person, and then a producer overseeing a project. But brands are used to having an account manager to handle all their queries and issues – make sure you assign one of those too!"*

9. Exclusive Interviews with **26 Top Global Experts** in Brand Funded Programming

UNITED KINGDOM

INTERVIEW:

Samantha Glynne

Global Senior Vice President
of Branded Entertainment

Fremantle

Samantha is based in London but drives branded entertainment activities for Fremantle around the world, working with regional commercial and digital teams to deliver brand strategy, lead key relationships with brands and agencies, and maximise advertiser engagement on TV and digital platforms. Samantha was formerly Managing Partner and Director of Channels at Publicis Entertainment in London and Paris and Head of Commercial Content at North One Television/ All3Media.

What IS branded entertainment or brand funded programming?

Branded entertainment is a piece of entertainment that people will seek out for entertainment, but that happens to be funded by a brand. Entertainment that they will watch, be absorbed by, share – and it's irrelevant where the funding has come from.

The shows Fremantle makes are on air in 50-60+ countries. Brands who come to us to be part of our storytelling know they are getting engaged fans, IP that works. But we can also co-create with them – what story do we want to tell together? We can put brands into shows – such as the Dunkin Cup on **America's Got Talent**. But what can we do next?

I like to call it BFP (brand funded programming) not AFP (Advertiser Funded Programming), as the term AFP already feels anachronistic! Now it's not just about advertisers paying money – there are hybrid co-developments, different finance models, sponsorship, 360 assets, co-productions, it's all much more fluid.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current or future shows?

The main commercial broadcasters in the UK are now increasingly saying "We love the idea, but can you come back when you've found the money to fund or co-fund it?" More and more producers getting in touch with ideas for which they need to find a brand partner, Simon Wells at Channel 4 is ringing me up regularly saying 'We've got another one…"

What impact has this last year had? Which types of brand have more or less incentive and resources for this now?

Content is a great way to highlight brand purpose – much more effective than a 30 second spot. So brands that have had a story to tell during COVID

times, about their place in the community for example, can really benefit from branded entertainment now. That could be Unilever, P&G, Amazon, or other e-commerce brands.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding? Which work less well?

Just a couple of years ago *[2017, when Sam contributed to a book about Branded Entertainment prize-winners at Cannes Lions]* it was all about creating hype and PR around big, blue-chip films that could get picked up by the streamers. 5B, about the nurses on an AIDS ward in the 1980s, from Johnson & Johnson, or Unilever's Dads which went to Apple TV etc.

But the challenge now is to develop ideas that are scalable and returnable, formats that can get critical acclaim and audiences, but crucially also return.

Model 1 is where the producer starts with the show - as we did with **Supermarket Sweep**. We saw that Tesco were already doing their 'prices that take you back' campaign, so a retro show seemed perfect and we pitched it to Tesco for ITV. We started off with the commissioning team at ITV who really wanted it if we could get the funding. Tesco then came in for around half the series budget. The ITV commercial team and the agency probably weren't that happy as we had to move quite quickly without their involvement, but it all worked out well in the end as the first series was a great success. We went on to film series 2 with Tesco and everyone benefited.

Model 2 is where the brand comes with a request to develop an idea for them around a certain theme or positioning. Sometimes you co-create with them, sometimes you might retool something you already have. What's useful is you have the brand's audience research, needs and data to build it around. Then it goes to the broadcaster.

Both models can work but maybe the 2nd can be more successful because the brand has bought in earlier. We would usually ask them for some development money up front to show their commitment. And then set up a framework which makes the roles of Fremantle, the production company, the agency and the brand very clear.

The Secrets in My Family

We did a C4 show, **The Secrets in My Family**, with Ancestry and they agreed to put money behind the original UK show, with the vision that it would travel internationally.

When we did **Rough Guide to the Future** with Kevin McLeod for Channel 4, Vodafone were interested in sponsoring the show against tape sales in Australia, South Africa and Ireland – key territories for them.

There's a 3rd model that programme finance funds from media agencies such as which Publicis Apex, Omnicom and IPG Orion support which is where they finance shows in exchange for unsold ad inventory, and generally don't ask for any rights. Motion Content Group has a different way of doing things – they largely want rights, Exec fees, credits, distribution.

We explored an additional model, where we partnered with creative agency BBH to develop ideas together. It worked really well in terms of bringing together their creatives and ours, discussing topical themes that the planners had come up with – fear of AI, sustainability etc – and coming up with ideas. Three of them made it to market, but in the end we suffered from the fact that BBH US has a select amount of clients, and while the synergy of co-producing ideas together was excellent, what we really needed

were the right brands and their money on board. If I were doing it again I would do it with a bigger agency group and committed clients on board from the start; and also a broadcaster bringing us specific genre and slot needs.

But it is great to have the creative agency involved as they can push the brands, make them more daring, and then create all the other assets that surround and support the show – that's where the value lies and the agencies also have the audience insights to focus those. That's still where traditional TV falls down, and where data-driven companies like Netflix will fill the gap.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial/creative development?

It can take a long time to develop a BFP project – 12-18 months - and that costs so much for a brand. Marketing directors are often changing, so halfway through they may decide it's no longer their strategy, or not their project, or not a spending priority.

Unilever have done it well though – bringing in Kelly Mullen to head up Unilever Entertainment, so she can go direct to the different brands like Marmite or Domestos and encourage them to pursue these projects longer-term.

Is there a sweet spot in terms of funding for broadcaster and producer to make money?

The projects need to be co-financed by the broadcaster and the brand so they both love it and both promote it. **Extreme Everest with Ant Middleton** is a good example where Channel 4 co-funded it and promoted it well as a result.

Fremantle are used to sharing IP – with Syco, quiz format owners, whoever it might be – so that's not a problem for us. It's better to be realistic and share than try to own everything - and there are multiple benefits in having global partners who help promote the show around the world.

Are certain markets and demographics more receptive to BFP? Is that changing?

It's a really varied picture globally.

Obviously you can do so much more in Asia. The first season of Asia's Got Talent was 80% funded by brands.

The UK is where it's taking off even more, accelerated by COVID. Channel 4 have really ramped it up in the last 12 months, but even ITV are doing several BFP projects this year. Australia has plenty going on; and in the US there's a fair amount of brand-funded content in cable, but not so much on networks, although you do see plenty of traditional sponsorship on network channels.

Europe is very mixed. Motion Content have now hired someone in the Netherlands to work on projects that combine programme finance with brand support from their agency clients, which is a great future-facing idea, and I believe Publicis Apex are rolling out a similar model.

Spain and Italy are great for sponsorship and brand integration deals, but for BFP originals it's much more difficult– the broadcasters often want the brands to spend up the same amount in media as on the programme budget. France is almost impossible, with little leeway for brands to feature in factual content due to legal compliance. Germany is an evolving model, with **Germany's Got Talent** now funded by Publicis Apex.

Extreme Everest with Ant Middleton

All Star Driving School

How do you navigate different territory regulations with global projects?

It can be tricky but it depends on the brand. I believe that **All Star Driving School** for Channel 4 featured Suzuki, but they weren't interested in other territories, so The Story Lab could sell it elsewhere and attach other car brands. It was similar with **Supermarket Sweep**, here it's with Tesco but one of our brand parters was Green Giant in the US and we're looking at other supermarkets in Australia. It depends on your contract, but often you can offer a brand first refusal, and take it elsewhere with little problem.

Should smaller production companies or producers be taking more initiative in this area, or get in specialists? What would be your advice to those trying to navigate it for the first time?

Smaller indies probably should get someone to help them. It's very complicated if you don't keep an eye on it properly – bits of IP flying around all over the place. You need someone to manage the brand, explain why their product can't be in it 25 times; but also to deal with the broadcaster's commercial team. Those people might seem expensive to hire, but there are consultants around, like Vicky Kell, who has done webinars on LinkedIn and gives good advice to indies.

The stakeholders and creators need to be both educated and incentivised to get to grips with this area – from Production Managers to Development Producers to legal teams.

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INTERVIEW:

Simon Wells

Controller of Funded Content

Channel 4, UK

Simon has been Controller of Funded Content at Channel Four since 2014, driving the channel's creative partnerships and business models with brands. Prior to that he worked for 15 years in advertising and then joined Bazal Television, doing the same for many of Endemol's shows before joining Drum OMG in 2004.

Do you see brand funded programming as becoming more crucial to financing shows at C4?

The last eight months has had a big effect in terms of accelerating branded entertainment. Because of COVID alternative investment has become more of a financial imperative, but now the genie is out of the bottle it's not going to go back in.

I started out in advertising in the 80s making commercials for agencies like Lowe Howard Spink, BBH, WCRS, and at that time that's where a lot of the best creative talent was – now-famous directors making really innovative, special ads that engaged audiences and got people talking. But the explosion in channels, online video and on-demand affected the quality of those ads, they became commoditised, less valuable, things you can just spin through.

So now advertisers are looking for a better way to get audiences to FEEL something about them, and the planners and agencies are increasingly understanding the power of an emotional entertainment story on TV to do that.

Companies such as Unilever have set up their own divisions, like Unilever Entertainment [Kelly Mullen & Catherine Marlow] to pursue that. The **Me and My Afro** doc that Dove funded was part of that. Dove created a whole campaign off the back of it, and it fitted perfectly for them; they are very rigorous about everything they do to support their message; they really stand for something as a brand and people appreciate that.

Maybe this will change the way that traditional ad spends are allocated, but on balance we think it's raising the bar, getting brands to bake their brand values into entertainment more effectively – and then activating the hell out of whatever show it is they fund.

What impact has this last year had? Which types of brand have more/ less incentive and resource for this now? Will any changes last post-COVID?

At the start we spent the first 4-5 weeks working out which shows could still go ahead and which were going to be affected. Then as a channel we quickly came up with our approach to lockdown programming and briefed that out to clients and producers.

We had a few branded lockdown shows, like TSB's **Unsung Heroes**, Wrigley's **Celebs Go Virtual Dating**, and Erdinger's show on Jurgen Klopp. They did well with the audience, and

internally, and with a significant sum being lost from the commissioning budget in 2020, the conversation quickly became about how we can bring more money in in this way. Budgets will bounce back, but what has changed is that we have now opened the door to new types of effective Ad funded Branded Entertainment partnerships.

So the pandemic was a big kickstart, but I think the impact will last beyond it. If we can make shows that are ratings hits with brands, why shouldn't it continue afterwards? We've set up new working groups to look at it as a source of more revenue and investment in the future.

Because Channel 4's business model is ad funded, it is perhaps more incumbent on us to do this than other channels. ITV has been doing more and talking about doing more – they did the Waitrose-funded **A Year on the Farm** last month – but as they have production revenue too it's less vital. UKTV have always done quite a lot, and Channel 5 some too.

And it needs all of us to grow the size of the market together.

But we may also need some help from the regulators. Ofcom only allowed product placement 10 years ago – we were one of the last countries to do this. We as an industry need to be putting the case to Ofcom that we need some flexibility, or at least clarity, with the undue prominence rules. There are lots of brands who have suffered because of COVID – car brands who have had all their live events cancelled for example. If they want a show about what they are doing around electric vehicles where do they go? Currently the SVODs…there's some great examples already.

We've done lots of shows like **Inside Rolls Royce**, **Inside Liberty** etc – we know those shows rate well – but the traditional model of "we make and pay for the shows and they give us access" is broken. We can't afford them

Inside Rolls Royce

anymore. But because of undue prominence we can't take their money for them either.

So instead Jaguar can go to Amazon Prime and make **Going Electric** for the US. It's a really good show, that is an excellent example of an editorialised product story told by the filmmaker or broadcaster. My argument would be if the viewer is notified through the current PP advice at the opening of a show then why couldn't this type of Branded Entertainment editorial be allowed.

Because of this we're very interested in examples from elsewhere in the world – Asia, Australia, the US – where it works fine and the audience has no problem with it.

Lots of the BFP shows we run have lots of international potential, so it's in brands and producers' interests to have the UK more in line with elsewhere. **All Star Driving School** was funded for 15 episodes on E4 by Suzuki – created to their brief, made by Rumpus – and is now running in six markets. But in Germany and Poland it's funded by Kia, and it's GM in Mexico.

Some European territories are also constrained by AVMS, the European regulator, so in theory after Brexit we should have more flexibility, but only if Ofcom can help us.

Is BFP now acceptable in more slots and dayparts than it used to be?

When I started at Channel 4 six years ago the commissioners certainly saw it as a bit of a labour. AFP was generally for daytime or late-

night slots where it would fill the schedule without damaging share.

Now we're disappointed if we don't manage to get them into peak. They rate well, and the more of them there are, the more clients see good examples and say 'that's what I want!"

There's a new generation of commissioners coming through who don't think it risks compromising the editorial as long as it's done well and everyone is clear from the start about what their objectives are. It's now much more of a collaboration with them from the start, and Ian Katz has encouraged the commissioning team to embrace that.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding and how have they evolved?

We don't really have a set model – it can come about in a number of ways.

Probably the most common is that a client like Unilever, or an agency comes to us and says we've got a brief for brand x, who are looking for a show. We look at what we've got in development or been recently pitched that might fit, and we discuss it with them.

Sometimes we might put the brief out to 5-6 select indies and put a shortlist of their ideas together.

Sometimes producers come with an idea, and already have a discussion with a brand underway. We prefer them to come with something not too fully formed so that we can help shape, editorialise and craft it.

And then also we send out a sales flyer every quarter with some relevant and appropriate new shows that we're looking for funding partners for, to drive interest and partnerships.

The difference between a sponsorship and an ad-funded proposition is that with the former we are fully financing and funding the show and then offering on a programme sponsorship with the standard TV sponsorship rights to associate around it.

The latter kicks in when we have a show we would like to make in partnership with a brand. We can co-fund it, but we're looking for them to fund the majority, in exchange for various AFP activation and associated rights in the UK. Beyond the UK territory the producer and brand are able to collaborate on a deal that works for both parties.

Along with that they ideally get to embed and weave into the editorial in a natural and seamless way their values and messages, and do as much with the activation around it as they want – social and digital, in advertising, in stores, online, events, press, etc.

Our most recent example is Dulux funding the new version of **Changing Rooms** next year. We were already discussing bringing it back with Shine, and Shine spoke to Dulux's agency MediaCom, about them getting involved. It's a very natural fit – the biggest way to change a room is with colour, so their paint and products will be integrated into the entertainment values and stories of the show very easily. And key messages about their product attributes, such as the effects of colour on space, mood and design which are all part of the story, will be highlighted and conveyed. Messages and brand values that would be very hard to convey to such an extent and in such a natural and effective way in a more traditional advertising medium.

What are the main obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial/creative development?

You do have to tell some brands that it's counter-productive to try and shoehorn in too much of the product. Viewers are comfortable with it up to a point, but don't push it too far.

Our research team did a big report on audience reaction to branded entertainment, and they identified this issue of 'Persuasion Knowledge'.

It's like wandering past a shop and thinking 'that looks nice, I'll have a look inside', but then you get in and a shop assistant keeps following you around saying "can I help you?" The experience changes from something nice you've chosen to someone actively trying to sell you something.

Channel 4 have to retain control of the editorial – both for the Ofcom guidelines, but also because we know our audience best. But then the brand can have a free hand to be more explicit and commercial in all of the activation around the show – the social, press, ad spots, posters, events, stores. It's a branded entertainment campaign, with the TV show at the centre driving it all.

You must have to wrangle a lot of different people along the chain - brand, agency, producer, commissioner. How do you manage those competing stakeholders?

We deal with the agency and client, and we have a team of experienced project managers and salespeople who specialise in branded entertainment and can talk to the brand clients. Usually there's a core team of the producer, project manager, sales team person and the commissioner across the show.

You have to think of it more like a co-pro; there are lots of stakeholders, you have to listen to both sides, you have to be collaborative, and you have to be very clear about expectations and responsibilities up front.

Are certain audience demographics more receptive to BFP and is that changing?

Younger audiences are definitely more open to it. While older viewers grew up with blurred out logos, and brands just within ad breaks, the younger generation are used to the lines being much more blurred on social media and elsewhere.

We research the audience response to our branded entertainment projects via our audience team, but usually the brand does too, so we can share our findings and work out what the impact is for both sides.

The report we did in November has been used to broaden our knowledge of the audience for BE, but also to help sell the opportunity to other brands.

The C4 report Branded Entertainment had some pretty persuasive findings:

- Branded Entertainment can boost brand perceptions +29% vs. a traditional spot advertisement;
- 44% feel more positive about a brand after seeing it in a programme;
- and six in ten viewers feel positive about Branded Entertainment as an approach to advertising – appealing particularly well to younger audiences.

The study examined a combination of existing academic studies, quantitative and qualitative research into existing Channel 4 Branded Entertainment shows, with extensive analysis from behavioural specialists and market research experts at the BVA Group.

Should smaller production companies or producers be taking more initiative in this area, or get in specialists? What would be your advice to those trying to navigate it for the first time?

Indies need to start thinking about talking to brands as well. They need to think of it as just another co-production model in the new media economy – just as they would have previously talked to a distributor to get some pre-sale investment.

CASE STUDY:

Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds at Christmas

2017

Channel 4

Age UK saw significant changes in brand perceptions after people watched **Old Peoples Home for 4 Year Olds at Christmas** *on Channel 4. Being an 'uplifting brand' saw a statistically significant +51% increase, whilst being 'caring and compassionate' jumped +29% as a result of their partnership with the programme.*

CASE STUDY:

Where to Britain?

2018

Channel 4

Uber also saw huge brand perception shifts through showing the human side of the brand through **Where to Britain?** *The perception that Uber has friendly drivers increased by +95% and having a 'sense of humour' saw an increase of +105%.*

CASE STUDY:

24 Hours in A&E: Heart Special

2020

Channel 4

Harriet Foxwell, head of brand marketing at the British Heart Foundation said: "In partnership with Channel 4 and building from a much-loved programme, the **24 Hours in A&E: Heart Special** *provided us with a unique and very powerful opportunity to show the importance of our research. It helped to make the link between the work of BHF funded researchers and the treatments which change and saves lives every day. The results speak for themselves. Not only did we raise awareness of the BHF's lifesaving research but we inspired considerable support too. The donations we were able to generate surpassed all of our fundraising targets for the partnership and will help us to continue to beat the heartbreak caused by heart and circulatory conditions."*

Other Channel 4 shows developed in partnership with brands include **Extreme Everest with Ant Middleton** (in partnership with Berocca - a dissolvable flavoured mineral supplement in the form of a tablet), **All Star Driving School** (auto manufacturer Suzuki), and **Britain's Unsung Heroes** (in partnership with TSB and produced by ITN Productions for Channel 4.)

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INTERVIEW:

Paul Tremain

Head of Branded Entertainment

MediaCom

Paul heads up the partnerships team at MediaCom, responsible for developing branded entertainment solutions and partnership opportunities for MediaCom's various clients - including Coca Cola, Adidas, Innocent, Peugeot, TUI Travel, and many others.

Paul and his team have developed some of the most successful branded entertainment properties in recent years - including ad-funded programming (with broadcasters, production companies and talent), content partnerships, influencer marketing campaigns and experiential activations.

What's MediaCom's current BFP model and your role in it?

My role is to partner our brands with entertainment properties that audiences want to spend time with – whether that be linear TV shows, talent/influencers, or digital and social content.

Our model now is a bit different to others in that we are very proactive with commissioners and producers. We want to know what they are developing and need funding for.

That's a bit different to other agencies where they might get a brief from their client and then put it out to producers and channels to answer. But you can wait a long time to match a brand brief to a TV idea. Or you get a situation where – in trying to answer a brand brief – TV producers end up diluting their own specialism, compromising their skillset in making TV shows audiences want to watch, by trying to second guess what a brand might want. Often you just end up with an extended ad concept that way.

And then the problem is you have to sell it into the commissioners, and they might not want an idea like that. Much better is to ask commissioners or producers – what have you got that's 80% warm, but you just don't have the money for? Something audiences will want to spend time with that we can fit a brand around. And it helps to have an idea half-sold before we take it to a brand, otherwise it can get a bit awkward. I know of a sauce brand that got very excited about an idea recently and were ready to sign the cheque, but they can't get it commissioned.

At a PACT session I did recently I said to producers – don't look for briefs, look for challenges brands maybe have, but then just look at your slate and what you have.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

The model we've been pursuing is one where we then co-fund with the broadcast channel. This has worked well with Channel 4 as they really treat it as a partnership, and the shared ownership means everyone splits the risk and remains jointly invested in its success. It's in everyone's interest to protect the tx slot – no moving it to a graveyard slot – and work together to find the right slot for channel and brand.

Tour de Celeb

It works well for the channel because the brands can be a lever to helping them make the shows they want but can't afford; and for the brand because they can get more of their brand in, at a lower price point and with less risk.

How has brand funded TV programming and MediaCom's involvement in it evolved in the last decade?

About 10 years ago brands got really excited about AFP and the idea that they could buy their way onto TV. But they just ended up as expensive sponsorships that didn't really drive any ROI – shows with logos slapped on and a bit of product placement, that commissioners then buried. The term got a bit of a bad reputation and we stopped doing it.

Then we reintroduced an AFP division 5 years ago, and had good success with **Tour de Celeb**, funded by Skoda for Channel 5. Skoda had a heritage with cycling and this was about creating an extra leg of the Tour de France that sports stars and entertainment celebs could train for and compete in – it worked really for them.

And now AFP has really moved on – broadcasters like Channel 4 are treating brands as real partners. It's no longer being run via someone on the commercial sales team trying to sell a sponsorship, it's now commissioners coming to us to work with them.

I've really noticed that sea-change in the last couple of years. When we did the **Ant Middleton Everest** show (with Berocca) it ran in Sunday peak time, the brand didn't interfere with the editorial, it won awards and was really highly regarded.

The new partnerships are better and the funding models have evolved for sure. But what's really changed is technology, or rather social media, which is now at such a scale, and such a major part of every plan, that there are so many more touch points and ways to activate a brand around the TV show – whether it be via the talent's profile, or events, or all sorts of other spin-off assets. They all work together to make a much bigger property.

And of course they also make it much easier to measure the ROI. With **Ant Middleton** for example, we had certain access to him, and there were so many possible metrics: reach, posts, PR, 'sofa moments'. Now AFP is a marketing tool, it's not a sponsorship so much as a thing to drive your ROI – wrapping your band message around something.

Are any of these projects international, or is it territory by territory/ UK only?

We've just brokered the Dulux co-funding of the new version of **Changing Rooms**. That's been a very straightforward one as it's a natural fit, and a product that can easily be integrated without any Ofcom challenge.

Because it's a well-known format Shine are exploring the international potential but in general it's hard. The marketeers for a brand are different in every territory, so even with a global brand they all have different spend and priorities, and of course there are more broadcasters to convince. It could work more easily with a global streamer like Amazon or Netflix, but so far we're not seeing many of those opportunities. So generally my aim is to satisfy the UK brand divisions and broadcasters first, and the producers can try to get interest elsewhere.

What impact has this last year had? Which types of brand have more/ less incentive and resource for BFP now?

We've been quite lucky in that our big clients like Tesco and Lloyds Bank have spent well throughout, and we've been relatively unaffected.

Last year we did 7 BFPs, this year it will be 3. One with Dell that will air next year, **Changing Rooms** with Dulux, and **Celebs Go Virtual Dating** with Wrigleys. We would have had more but there have been challenges to filming, to development, and also of course to budgets.

But of course that does present more opportunities as broadcasters need to look elsewhere for funding.

What are the obstacles or challenges and how does an agency (like MediaCom) mediate and drive the process?

It all depends – you never really know what kind of client you'll have. Some are very analytical and will want to spend a lot of time on measuring reach and value. Others projects are driven by brand marketeers who are generally happy to just make some noise.

Our role is setting expectations and trying to encourage them to see the bigger picture – the scale of the overall opportunity, and how it might be worth redirecting media spend from elsewhere to have a bigger impact.

We set the parameters at the start so everyone understands why they are doing it, what they are expecting, and what the challenges might be. The last 16-17 projects we've done have all been a success – they all had turbulence along the way for sure, but you get there in the end. You have to reassure them that it won't be easy, it's not like a traditional media buy, but we can help with production management and liaising with their other agencies and the producers. That's particularly key when you are needing quick sign-off on assets or materials for example.

Bringing the producers into conversation with the client is key, and sometimes the commissioners too, but it needs to be done at the right time. Generally MediaCom will sell an idea into the brand client, and try to get some indicative sign-off, before getting the producer and commissioner in to get it over the line. It can be worth getting everyone together for creative conversations early on, but you don't want to waste everyone's time until it's concrete. Above all everyone has to feel it's a partnership, not a land grab.

Is there a sweet spot in terms of funding and who invests what?

In the UK the sweet spot for a brand to spend is probably around £500-750k. They can usually justify that and it's not too hard to get. What the channel and the producers need to understand is that it's important to leave enough in the pot for the brand to over-invest in all the activation around the show, as that will ultimately benefit everyone involved. If the show is well marketed

and has profile, and if the brand can afford to spend on other paid media, 'first in break' spots and other promotion, it can lead to incrementals and spin-offs for the producer and will be for the wider good of the project.

So it's worth being sensible about the level of investment, not greedy. Channel 4 will often come in at 50/50 on a project. With ITV you'd be lucky to get a co-funded show – generally they want to brand to pay most or all.

But ITV are making encouraging moves in this area. Sky have the appetite to do more brand funded short-form I think, but they don't commission that much for Sky One, so it's hard. There are more opportunities with Sky Arts and Docs. We haven't done any with Channel 5 for a while. Channel 4 are definitely the most set up for it, and can offer the broadest suite of VOD, contextual ads, social and digital promotion.

Is there any change in the types or genres of content brands are interested in funding now?

Producers obviously would rather have a returning format as that's when they start to make money. But a brand marketeer might only be interested in a one-off around a specific campaign. **Ant Middleton's Everest** show worked as a noisy one-off for Berocca; but obviously Tesco are hoping their funding of **Supermarket Sweep** works as a longer opportunity, as Dulux will be for **Changing Rooms**.

In terms of genres, we have most success in factual entertainment, lifestyle and light entertainment. Those areas lend themselves most readily to specialist content. Scripted is much harder and the lead times are so long. Music was once popular but became too crowded and is now very limited on TV.

Do you get involved in helping brands measure the impact of their BFP spend? How does that work?

We have a team that measures the impacts pre- and post-campaign, the "brand love", but then the channel often do the same, so we have a lot of data. And that's all useful for selling the idea of AFP to the next client.

What would be your advice to TV producers trying to navigate this world for the first time?

We are keen to collaborate with producers of all sizes, so they should definitely invest time in building relationships with brands and agencies. But they need to stay true to what THEY do best – making entertainment that audiences want to come to. Stay flexible and come with an open mind, but don't dilute your expertise or what you do.

And you don't need to be Endemol Shine/ Banijay. We've worked with smaller indies and it can sometimes be easier, with more access to the top people. The Ant Middleton Everest idea came via our conversations with his agent, and then small indie Parable came on board and developed it. There were only six of them, but they were great in front of the client, and got Ian Katz and Ralf Lawrie really excited about the show. They just didn't have the money to make it, which was where we brought Berocca in.

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INTERVIEW:

Cathy Boxall

Global Senior Vice President
of Branded Entertainment

The Story Lab

The Story Lab is dentsu International's global entertainment studio business. The Story Lab produces, distributes and markets premium entertainment content IP for talent, brands, streamers and channels globally including **Ninja Warrior**, **Game of Clones** *and* **All Star Driving School**.

Cathy heads up the global Brand Entertainment team at The Story Lab providing entertainment consultancy and original brand entertainment development services for international clients including AB InBev, Vodafone, Jaguar Land Rover, Procter & Gamble and Philips

What IS branded entertainment or brand funded programming?

Branded Entertainment has to be entertaining! Audiences have to want to seek it out and engage with it – it's not an extended ad or sales message. It's a longer term play, that can also grow and build an audience over time, ideally over multiple series.

What is The Story Lab's model when it comes to brand funded TV programming?

We offer an entertainment consultancy for brands. So we advise them where to invest into entertainment, how much, what kind of genres and properties etc. We evaluate and help them to negotiate those deals, and we also provide strategy in the form of workshops, white papers and information on content trends so they are well informed on what is happening in the industry and how that affects them. So for example K7 Media recently helped us with some work on trends in travel shows for Corona, food for Stella and sport and big entertainment shows for Budweiser.

We also offer an entertainment partnership service including opportunities like TV sponsorships, such as Jaguar sponsoring the Sky Documentaries channel, which are usually funded through media deals.

Then we have our Originals department run through Mark Rosenegk formerly of Endemol Shine, who can help brands who want to create something all new, by introducing the right producers and distribution partner, helping with the brand integration, and building an effective campaign around the show. We created a show with Land Rover last year for Nat Geo, **Fiennes Return to the Nile**, with Ranulph and Joseph Fiennes on a road trip adventure together. And a youth-targeted travel series hosted by local influencers for Mediaset in Italy with Corona.

And at the high end we also leverage distribution for those clients who also want to monetise the

content they've funded – premium brands who want to offset some of the costs of production by selling their content internationally. Those are a very select tier, with the confidence and desire to approach this more like producers – like P&G, who did manage to sell their **Cost of Winning** documentary to HBO Max, all funded by Gillette as part of their "Best a Man Can Be" campaign.

The Cost of Winning

What impact has this last year had and which brands have more or less incentive and resource for BFP now?

By and large our global clients are doing well, and are positive about the future. They know they can't just sit on their hands, and our message has been that this is the time to strike, while the iron's hot. They realise they can't NOT do it, at this time when the appetite for brand funded entertainment is bigger than perhaps it's ever been. In the last 6 months we've had more clients than ever coming to us wanting to create high-quality, IP-led content, and what's great is that every day we have new, excellent examples to show them.

COVID has changed so much –brands are looking at where they can get involved, particularly in sports content, which is doing very well on Netflix, Amazon, HBO Max, and again has partly replaced actual sports. The Jurgen Klopp documentary on Channel 4, funded by Erdinger, was a great example – it was already in the works, but with lockdown, sports off, and Liverpool winning the league, it was the perfect zeitgeisty show to take advantage of the situation.

Is there any change in the types or genres of content brands are interested in funding now?

Most of the clients we deal with want to do the high end documentaries, with top talent and purpose-led stories that work for their brand. A few are interested in factual entertainment, but mostly it's documentary one-offs or series.

We've had a couple of briefs for returnable series, and some brands are realising that those can be more monetizable further down the line, but it's still rarer.

What about the channels and platforms they want to be on?

The thing that all of the brands want now – since their execs all spent lockdown sat at home watching Netflix! – is to get onto streaming platforms. They've realised that that's where their audiences are going now, and it's driving them crazy that they can't access them. Their normal models of media buys, or paid content just don't work on the streamers.

Unfortunately the streamers' business model has nothing to do with brands. They might do the odd tie up to get *Stranger Things* merchandise in a shop window, but they don't need their money to make content, or not enough to cede any control.

Our message is that it is possible, but not if it's all about your brand message. You'll need to think like a producer and make it all about the creative –or work hand in hand with a credible producer, because it's not about your money, it's about what the audience want to watch. Sometimes brands might be able to offer up access to talent, but only if they've already negotiated those rights with them.

And then even if you did get a piece of content away with them, it would be very brave to spend a good chunk of your year's marketing budget with a platform who won't tell you who watched it, for how long, or give you any other kind of metric to measure your ROI against. It might be

great for kudos, but most of these companies are very ROI-driven, so it's a bit of a gamble.

But maybe this will all change and the streaming platforms will come round to some kind of brand-funded model. COVID has had such an impact on broadcasters – to the extent that you now have Channel 4 opening up their primetime slots and top talent to brands, and we are telling our clients 'this is the time!' So maybe some of the streamers will eventually come round too. Amazon are gradually trying to pull all those strings together – e-commerce, brands, fashion, sport – that it may happen with them sooner.

And when Amazon Originals do start to take advantage of their position in the market, the other broadcasters could well be in trouble as there is so much more they can do – they certainly aren't currently governed by broadcast codes in the same way.

But we say to brands that for example if you work with a big local free to air channel like Channel 4 you do also have more chance of retaining rights so that's a really interesting route for brands with a global footprint who are interested in monetising their content internationally. It's certainly a lot less exciting or appealing for brands these days when producers or platforms want to retain those rights.

Are certain markets and demographics more receptive to BFP? Is that changing?

We have local teams in different territories so we get a good picture.

Italy is fairly regulated, but we managed to do a travel show for Mediaset called **Disconessi on the Road** that was fully funded, but also well integrated, with the product featuring a fair amount, although not influencing the editorial. We also have Fastweb as a client there and they have done 5 seasons of a show called **Giu in 60 Secondi**.

Giu in 60 Secondi

Recently our team in France were able to create a great opportunity for Bellevoye whisky – by creating a documentary all about French manufacturing for Canal+ in which the brand only appeared for a small part, alongside various other French-made success stories. It was fully compliant because they had no editorial approval or input and there was no undue prominence for the brand'.

Are you able to develop international BFP projects at Story Lab, or is it easier territory by territory?

Where we pick up a show in one territory, like **All Together at the Table** (M6), we can then take it to clients in different territories early and offer it to them as an exclusive integration or sponsorship opportunity.

We did it with **All Star Driving School** where Suzuki originally funded it for C4, but then licensed it to GM in Mexico for E!, Sony and Amazon. It's done so well for them that GM are now taking it into the rest of Lat Am.

But sometimes it is hard for global clients to develop or pitch a global property from scratch, with local teams and marketeers with different budgets and priorities. And if it's not for a global channel like Nat Geo or Discovery, they also have different broadcasters to pitch it to. The international cable channels like Nat Geo and Discovery can seem like an easier one-stop solution for that reason, but to a local marketeer they often don't really provide the reach to make it worth a big chunk of their COVID-hit annual marketing budget. They will always prefer their big mainstream terrestrial channel.

So one option we tend to recommend in that situation is to pick a strong lead market, do it there first, and then you can potentially take it on into other territories.

But if you are a brand with a big central marketing fund or an innovation budget you might be keen to try and work with or even create your own a global property, and again, the streamers might seem like a good short-cut to that. It's certainly more tempting than even say, trying to do a global deal for an international format like **X Factor**, where you're still coming up against different slots, talent, audience, budgets and commissioners across multiple territories.

What would be your advice to TV producers trying to navigate this world for the first time?

Producers are going direct to brands more now. And producers need to realise, although THEY are the ones with the power - because they are the ones who can knock on the door at Netflix and get an idea away - it's not that simple when it comes to creating entertainment with brands. You need to learn how to pitch to them, how to address their challenges and how to speak to them – and that's quite different to pitching to commissioners. Brands are used to working with agencies where they have long-standing relationships and are used to having complete creative control and control of their message. To spend time and money creating long-form entertainment projects together, they really need to trust you.

At The Story Lab we help brands find the right producers to help them to tell their brand stories, and to do that we have quite a rigorous evaluation process – checking their credibility, their ratings success, their expertise, and whether they've worked with brands before, but we also handle the comms on behalf of the brands and make sure that KPIs are set and expectations are managed on both sides from the beginning.

There are also some fantastic experts on the platform side who are great at bridging that gap between brands and creators – like Simon Wells at Channel 4 –They are able to manage expectations, can balance those competing objectives and simultaneously keep all the balls in the air.

And it's important to understand that the model is different now – the brands aren't just coming with a big bag of money. They want rights, and a share of what they've helped fund and create.

With that in mind we are also starting to suggest to brands that if they find a producer they trust, then it might be worth investing in some development so that both sides are bought in and have a position in the show from the start. That can be hard as brands don't like risk, and TV development doesn't come with a guarantee – so sometimes it's a good option for brands to spread some of the risk by starting with smaller bets like podcasts or online content.

It's hard for brands when they are used to a model [advertising] where they pay for content that is guaranteed to air – for a price. We sometimes still have to impress upon brands that they can't just pay their way onto TV – even if they go off and make and fund a piece of entertainment, a buyer won't just automatically put it on their channel, if it's not right.

It's incumbent upon all sides to leave their egos at the door and be willing to explore all sorts of flexible models around rights, revenues and ways of working.

But brand doors are open, if you can create something that works for them. To do that it helps to understand their challenges, but of course it's hard for producers to dedicate time to all of that, as well as to understanding everything about every channel's needs too, so that's where an agency like The Story Lab can help translate and interpret those brand challenges for producers.

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INTERVIEW:

Vicky Kell

BFP Consultant

Vicky has worked in brand partnerships for over 20 years, including a 10 year stint at Channel 4, where she worked across sponsorship, BFP and product placement. For the past 5 years she has been freelance, consulting predominantly on brand funded programming, including a year spent at Syco overseeing commercial and brand partnerships.

Tell us a bit more about how you help the various different parties navigate brand funded TV programming. What are they now coming to you for help with?

I recently put out a roundup of UK AFP in 2020 on LinkedIn and was surprised by the level of interest from the production sector - from smaller producers through to the bigger studios - from the UK and Denmark, South Africa, Brazil and beyond.

I give production companies consultancy advice on what to do in the brand space - that could be anything from setting up a department, to what to do on their YouTube channel. I can help producers find brands for shows, and then manage that relationship with the brand which frees up the producer to work on the show itself. I liaise between broadcaster, brand, agency and producer and get the formats in front of the right people at the channels and agencies.

Do you think BFP growing into a bigger part of many brands' TV strategy? What impact has this last year had?

This area was growing rapidly anyway, AND this year has had a big impact, not BECAUSE of what's happened this year. Budgets are being squeezed all over, so broadcasters and producers are far more open to alternative sources of funding, and brands are looking for alternative ways of getting their message out.

What's changed a lot is the types of genres and dayparts we're seeing BFP in now. In the UK it used to be a bit of late night music, early morning sport, some weekend food programming and that was pretty much it. But in the last few years there's been a real diversification of genres – like the Lloyds Bank show, Save Well Spend Better, on personal finance, or Kevin McCloud's Rough Guide to the Future with Vodafone; but also a move into peak slots, which of course really helps the ROI for brands.

But there's also been a real growth in one off docs for the terrestrials. Waitrose did **A Year on the Farm** for ITV, and Dove did **Me and My Afro Hair** for Channel 4. There was Britain's Unsung Heroes from TSB, and a Jurgen Klopp documentary from Erdinger.

You might assume that the brands would all want returning series, but actually the one-off doc is lower cost, lower risk, and can still have lots of long lasting activations off the back of it. When brand priorities and personnel can change, it can be a big gamble to try to create content that the broadcaster AND the brand will want to keep bringing back. Will it keep working for both? There are lots of stakeholders to keep happy.

A Year on the Farm

What are the most effective models for creating brand funded TV that you've seen?

It can work in all sorts of different ways, but a good media agency can really help. Then it's the commercial team at the broadcaster who are also key – producers don't often understand how the agency relationship works, but it's the commercial team that handle them and the client and project manage all the activation around the show, because that's not really the commissioner's role.

It really pays to have everyone bought in early on - there can be so many stakeholders, it's important that everyone's on board and understands the process from the outset.

A good agency can also really get the ROI to stack up for the brand and that is vital. They will be measuring anything that can be measured – press, social media interaction, ratings, brand awareness, product sales or enquiries. And then the broadcaster can sometimes do their own qualitative research which is very useful.

What are the obstacles/challenges to brand / TV partnerships?

The number of stakeholders is an issue, but there's no getting round that! It just needs to be managed well.

So is compliance – I am currently working on a documentary with a brand attached that we think we won't be able to make because of compliance.

And so is scheduling. C4 have built the relationship with their schedulers so that they understand that if you move something – either in terms of date or daypart – it can have a huge impact on the brand's ROI. Other broadcasters are still catching up when it comes to that – they either don't get it or they don't care as much. But that is changing – there is growth in this area, and they can't be seen to be lagging behind or the deals will go elsewhere.

Which UK channels are doing most in this area?

Channel 4 started to really dominate the space a few years ago; ITV have ramped up from two or three projects last year to five or six in 2020

Channel 5, MTV, Discovery and Nat Geo have all dipped their toes in the water. UKTV really used to do a lot of BFP but that has decreased since they sold their lifestyle channels

There have been very few global BFP projects – or global from the outset. If you're doing something for Nat Geo or Discovery that can obviously be built in upfront. Channel 4 have

mostly just had UK shows, although they have had tape sales of their documentaries, and the **Celebrity Driving School** Suzuki series did sell as a format.

Sunset and Vine did a lot to max out the global distribution on Gillette World Sport.

Should smaller production companies or producers be taking more initiative in this area or getting in specialist help? What is your most important bit of advice to TV producers trying to navigate this world for the first time?

Smaller indies ARE doing this now. This year there have been about 20 ad funded commissions – around 50% were from big groups like All3Media, Fremantle, ITV Studios, but the other 50% were mostly from indies. No single producer dominates this space in the UK.

A lot of brand funded shows don't return so, as a smaller producer, if you get one away you might not have another for 2-3 years.

My biggest piece of advice to producers would be don't underestimate the time and resource it requires! Some producers have tried it, realised how much time it takes to develop the idea, have the conversations with the brand and the broadcaster and get all the planets to align, and then give up because it's too hard.

And even when you get it away the resource required in handling the client through the process, and at the post-production end can be immense. Particularly with the non-broadcast assets that brands require - sometimes the agency will handle them, but generally it needs the production company to oversee them. For example on Berocca's **Extreme Everest** show, they had to do all the VR and AR for in-store promotions too. It's another entire workflow for the producers, and it needs to be done carefully to make sure it's all complementary to the main show.

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Alex Bescoby

Filmmaker and Managing Director

Grammar Productions

Alex is an award-winning filmmaker and presenter, with broadcasts on History, BBC, Discovery and Canal+ International

The Last Overland was initially set to follow 87-year-old Tim Slessor, recreating a journey he had completed in 1955, where he and a group of Oxford and Cambridge university undergraduates drove from London to Singapore. Our team were going to join him and drive from Singapore to London in one of the original Land Rovers from the first expedition. Unfortunately on the day we were setting off Tim became unwell and his 21 year old grandson stepped in and took his place, creating a really authentic, global travel series with multi-generational appeal.

We worked with a number of brands on this project. For me it's crucial, but you need to start with the story first - as a documentary maker you need to really believe in the story, it has to excite you. This feeds through to the brands and gives them confidence in their investment. The story needs to have real, independent authenticity - in this example it was about one old man and his last great dream. As a filmmaker you don't want to shoehorn a brand that doesn't fit with the story, you want the story to have real heart and substance and then partner with brands who give you the freedom to tell it.

Some brands were understandably nervous as Tim was 87 years old and there were potential risks due to filming in some dangerous parts of the world, but those who came on board came to see that "taking risks in life" was at the heart of the story.

I made it clear in all my negotiations and contracts with each brand that their product would not be prominently on screen in the eventual TV programme, beyond natural appearances for example with cars and equipment. This was key to maintaining authenticity. We focused instead on telling the story in real time online via our organic social media following which grew to tens of thousands.

There was a lot of PR activity leading up to the journey, and the online social media activity included filming small, bespoke content for the brands and promoting their products or services in a more direct way through mini campaigns all along the journey (as we did with Opihr Gin).

The Singapore Tourist Board was one of the brands to back the project early on. They were an ideal partner given our starting point, and as the expedition's story was a perfect fit for their

core message of "Passion Made Possible". Land Rover were another major brand partner, and we worked closely with their regional and global team to share the story of a car that is part of the founding story of their brand.

It was important also for us to work with brands whose services were essential to the expedition's smooth operation. For example, another brand we worked with was fintech firm Revolut. They provided their global banking and currency services for free allowing us to transfer money or withdraw money all over the world. This saved quite a substantial amount on transfer fees. Craghoppers provided us with high-quality, hard-wearing hot and cold kit for all the team, Dometic supplied mobile power and car-fridges, and AKE International provided the team with high-end security support, which was essential as we travelled through some dangerous and hostile place. They all saw their products and services in action, which made for a very happy partnership.

Opihr Gin was another brand involved in the project. They want their brand to reflect the spirit of adventure and their gin is inspired by the Silk Road flavours, along which The Last Overland travelled. It was a really neat fit, and it was a joy working together before, during and after the expedition.

Klareco Communications, a Singapore based communications company PR and comms support on our journey through Asia. They were essential for handling crisis management which was crucial when Tim fell ill on Day One, providing them with a great case study for future clients! Klareco's campaign won an industry award for its innovation and reach (350 million globally), which made us very proud. Battleface provided travel insurance, Hagerty covered the cars while Stephenson Harwood offered free legal advice. Fortnum and Mason donated several hampers for us to take on the journey, and Bremont Watches gave each member of the team a watch to wear. Some brand reps joined the expedition for a couple of days, including one CEO.

Keeping brand expectations aligned and ensuring commitments could be adapted in line with the fluid nature of an expedition were my main concern. I spent a lot of time on the trip communicating with the senior teams at these companies, keeping them updated on what we were doing and reassuring them on the return on their investment. Building trust was vital and caring about the brands and respecting their

image and values even more so. Not every brand can operate in such an atmosphere of uncertainty, but we were glad we chose well.

My philosophy is "make multi-platform events, not just a TV show", and I've really seen how the right brand partners can help with that. I've always admired Long Way Up and how Harley Davidson provided their LiveWire motorbikes for that - putting their reputation on the line as their products are put to the test in extreme conditions. I've also experienced how partnerships with non-profit organisations can be equally powerful. Our film 'Forgotten Allies' (History) ended up raising considerable amounts of money for WW2 veterans in Burma and helped to shape UK government policy on welfare for Commonwealth veterans – something of which I'm deeply proud.

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INTERVIEW:

Levison Wood

Writer, Explorer, Photographer and Co-founder

Blackmane Media

Levison Wood has produced six critically acclaimed documentary series including Walking the Nile, Walking the Himalayas and Walking the Americas for Channel 4. They have sold extensively all over the world. He is co-founder of the production company Blackmane Media. Levison is also a Major in the British Army and served in the Parachute Regiment for 13 years.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

In the aftermath of COVID 19 brands are going to be even more crucial to funding content. They have already been essential to my productions and expeditions.

In particular tourist boards and other travel brands will be keen to invest in content now as they need to re-engage with people and get them to spend money.

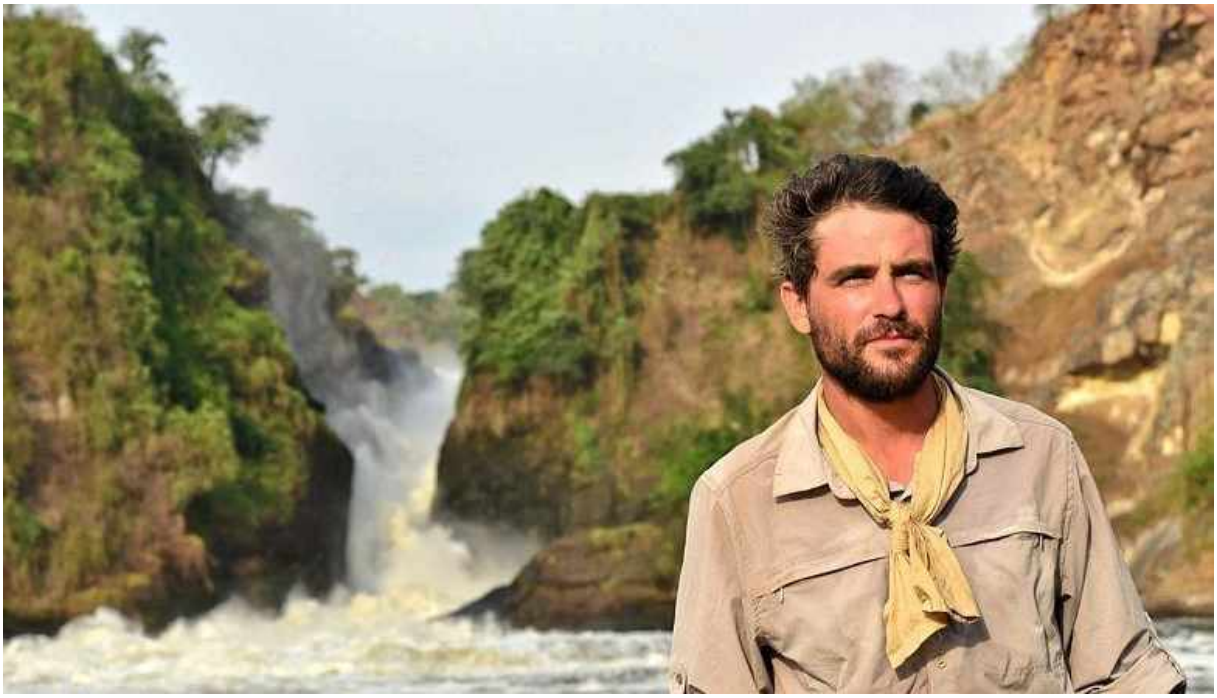
How do you choose or find the brands for your projects?

I choose the brands I work with very carefully and try to support British brands with good morals and a positive profile. They also tend to be more high-end luxury brands such as Belstaff, with whom I collaborated and designed jackets. Oliver Sweeney is another brand that has been a partner. If I have received payment from a brand such as Belstaff, I always make sure I don't just wear that brand on screen. And I only work with brands that I would buy myself!

I did a campaign with Clinique which is a brand you wouldn't associate with adventure but it was something they really wanted to be linked with. Another was a collaboration with Rolls Royce. And then I've worked closely for quite some time with Leica cameras. They have supported my photographic exhibitions and I use their cameras on my expeditions. The brands I work with all totally understand that their products and services cannot be forced into the documentaries – nothing is staged.

I did some work with CNBC and on the back of that with South African Tourism. They wanted to promote South Africa as a business destination and encourage business visitors to stay on after their business trip and enjoy the country. We filmed with top chefs at many of the luxury hotels and restaurants and spoke with some of world's most pioneering doctors which South Africa has many of, as well as going on safaris and filming some of the most incredible landscapes and wildlife and shark diving. The idea was *showing* South Africa rather than telling audiences about all the extraordinary people, places and experiences it has to offer.

I've turned down working with many brands that have approached me if I don't feel comfortable with the company, its ethics or the product or service they provide. But those I do work with I'm very loyal to and respect them and the teams that work there.



Walking the Nile

What are the obstacles or challenges?

Working with brands is incredibly time consuming. I would suggest to small production companies planning on working with them to collaborate with an agent who has the correct contacts at the companies or spend a lot of time building strong relationships with key brand managers.

When I'm filming one of my expeditions I spend a lot of time off camera liaising with the various brands and keeping them updated. I also spend a lot of time liaising with the many different charities I'm ambassador to. For example, when I was filming **Walking the Nile** I did a lot of work with The Tusk Trust. When we filmed **Walking the Himalayas** I did a lot of work with The Gurkha Welfare Trust, and whilst filming **Arabia With Levison Wood** I took photos of children in bombed out cities in Syria and sent them to UNICEF.

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AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

INTERVIEW:

Mike Connaghan

Managing Director
Commercial Content

News Corp Australia

Leading the expansion of News Corp Australia's content agency portfolio Connaghan will oversee Suddenly, audio and native content production, and he'll join Medium Rare's board, which also includes content agency Storyation. Mike is also chairman of the groundbreaking RUOK? suicide prevention campaign.

As managing director, Commercial Content Connaghan will draw on his extensive experience to implement within the company News Corp Australia's vision of a consortium of independent but collaborative content agencies.

Connaghan has a long and storied career in Australia's advertising industry, having started with the legendary Singleton Ogilvy and Mather agency and going on to lead that business as it expanded.

As that agency joined with others to create STW, the largest marketing content and communications company in Australasia, Mike was CEO for a decade until 2016 when STW acquired the Australian and New Zealand operations of international advertising business WPP.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial or inevitable to financing current and future shows?

I think it's current, it's a reality, particularly for broadcast television traditionally reliant on advertising dollars. The model has changed so much over the last 20 years. When I first spoke to TV about doing brand funded programme deals it was a 50/50 split of production - these days it's 100% branded.

Funded content is critical to the whole process. Very few shows are without it now, most movies have a brand component to them.

The subscription businesses such as Netflix have obviously shaken up the traditional model so it will be interesting to see how their model evolves.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

It depends on the commercial outcome that brands are looking for, but clearly brands being integrated into content where it is natural, as opposed to a jolt, work the best. Brands that fit into a format that are part of the story so that people are not being "force- sold". It's best where it's part of the delivery and the narrative – force feeding into content can actually do more harm than good.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on the editorial?

Again, it depends on the format. Drama is very different to reality TV for example. Demonstrative TV, like cooking or travel shows, are natural vehicles for brands to be involved with. It's less natural in drama but with the right kind of creative intent, the right kind of brand management and a relationship between producers and clients, there is no reason why it can't be seamlessly integrated.

MasterChef Australia

Is there a sweet spot in terms of funding for broadcasters and producers to make money?

Some formats are made for brand funding, and as long as the content delivers the eyeballs everybody is happy. Good content brings good ratings and then the broadcaster can sell that content outside of clients that have bought into it initially.

If clients can get across the whole hour, the commerce will flow from that.

Are there any categories that are more active in the content space now in Australia?

Retail and FMCG, particularly foods and beverages are very active. Travel would be a natural fit right now, but unfortunately it is not their time. The growing opportunities are in health, well-being, finance and government.

What do you think is the motivation for brands to get involved in content creation?

Being involved in the actual programming part of content creation - if a natural fit it is then delivering a relevant message for the audience. It's utility content that is providing a service, entertainment and something to the target market that they wouldn't get had the brand not stepped in to facilitate – it's entertainment, it's information, it's empowerment.

Are certain markets and demographics more receptive to BFP? Is that changing?

Some branded content can be aimed at small targets, or quite niche, but more mainstream things like **MasterChef** are more enduring - certainly in Australia food has become a high interest category. Retail, cookware and food brands involved there in helping educate people and also helping sell products - it's a win-win. But for a different audience eg tech or finance, the content might not be necessarily catching big eye balls but for a small audience you are providing a niche component that is driving interest and educating. It always comes back to the objectives of brands and where they are going to reach consumers.

How has BFP evolved in the last decade?

It's far more the norm, far more accepted. Many brands have become publishers of content in their own right. Marketers are more attuned to what they need to do to integrate properly, producers have come to accept the way to put

something on screen or film is going to have a brand component to it and done well can be a win win for both sides. Marketers should not try and over influence and content creators should not push back on the market – there is a better middle ground that has been found.

What impact has this last year had? Which types of brands have more/ less incentive and resources for this now?

Food and beverage have done really well and have more and more incentive and funds to get involved in content and more and more people are at home to consume it. Whereas the travel industry isn't flush with funds and inventory right now but probably has a willing audience who want to dream - but the industry can't afford it.

Health and wellbeing has become a bigger component for lifestyle genres.

Government should do better in their content creation and messaging. Governments in any normal year are the biggest advertiser. In a COVID year they are even bigger. Longer form integrated content is a great way to get a lot of information out there. It's really an untapped area for the government to use longer form content better.

Should production companies/ TV producers be taking more initiative in this area, or get in specialists? What would be your advice to those trying to navigate it for the first time?

Both - take more interest and initiative if they want, or if they need specialists they should get them in.

Do you have any useful lessons from any recent case studies you would like to share?

It's about being authentic, being natural and being part of the story as opposed to jolting and force fitting yourself into the story. Authenticity is important. People understand marketing makes the world go round but you've got to be respectful of their time. A natural protagonist within whatever format you are joining is important rather than looking unnatural.

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INTERVIEW:

Anita Godbeer

General Manager, PR, Social Content & Consumer Marketing

Tourism Australia

Anita is General Manager of PR, Social and Content and is responsible for of all Tourism Australia's content creation, earned and owned activities as well as their broadcast, events and advocacy program.

What do you think is the motivation for brands to get involved in content creation?

It allows for a deeper connection with your brand and enables a longer, more meaningful time spent with your customer than say a 30 second commercial.

It allows for an emotional connection to your brand which is ultimately what we are striving for, which aides long-term brand equity. Depending on the content, a great result can be that people either act immediately or it provokes an emotional connection that resonates over time. I have heard stories of people reading a book as a child that is about kangaroos which ignites a dream to travel to Australia as an adult.

This year we haven't done a lot of traditional advertising because borders have closed. So, we have been focussed on what we call "dreaming content", which we have really leaned into, with further dreaming content still in development phase.

Can you give me an example of some content that you have made that you feel has made that emotional connection?

At the beginning of COVID we created a series of content **With Love from Aus** which started as a short film piece on social media that we edited together with existing content. We then launched a 1hr special with The Project on Network 10 called **The Love Australia Project**. The special featured the tourism industry doing it hard all around the country and spoke about the importance of holidays not only for individuals but for the Australian economy as a whole. This special kicked off **Live from Aus**, a weekend of live streamed events on the hour, every hour with tourism operators and well-known Australians around the country. It was real people passionately sharing their stories from their unique corner of the world. It helped we had a captive audience during lockdown and they engaged in their millions. It was actually light paid media but the payoff and response was incredible. We reached 127 million unique social users globally with 34 million social views of the content and an estimated reach of 1 billion via earned media.

What kinds of partners do you currently work with?

We work with other tourism brands and state tourism partners and airlines around the world. When commissioning content we work with the other State bodies, networks, and production companies.

With Love From Aus

Which do you think are the most effective models funding in Australia? Which work less well?

Honestly, the less partners involved the easier it is because the end product can be diluted if you're trying to please too many stakeholders. We need to be focused on target audience, passion points and why would the audience care? I find, traditionally, travel content can fall into the bland category so we want to work with partners that are willing to push the boundaries, be creative and take a risk on new types of travel content.

Chef's Table is about the passion point of food but really it's telling beautiful human stories bringing people and places to life in an emotive and compelling way which ultimately drives desire to travel and visit the restaurants featured. Progressive brands are open to new and brave concepts that don't necessarily directly feature the 'key messages' but evoke a feeling and an emotional connection that will ultimately lead to action.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial?

A challenge can be the time quality content takes to create which doesn't always follow overarching campaign timelines or financial year budget schedules. As always we are competing within the organisation for the marketing spend. And in a year like this where we have experienced unparalleled pressures the bottom line, or in our case responsible spending of government funds, every dollar is rightly scrutinised. So getting risky and brave content projects off the ground can be challenging but what helps is a supportive leadership and board, which we are lucky enough to have.

Are there any categories that are more active in the content space now in Australia?

Categories that have anything to do with passion points. Renovation in Australia has been huge in COVID times. NRMA has been active in the content space, leaning into travel for instance, and creating some beautifully emotive content pieces.

Airlines have had to pull back for obvious reasons, but we are looking forward to that industry having a better year. We had to pivot and focus on domestic travel after the bushfires when internationally many thought the whole of Australia was on fire, then Covid hit and a core focus has been domestic travel. However, keeping Australia's brand equity strong internationally is essential during this time, so we are still focussed on keeping Australia on everyone's bucket and consideration list. We are very conscious of not going dark.

Are there certain markets and demographics that you are targeting with content creation? Is that changing?

Traditionally, internationally we have a yield strategy and are focused on the "high value" traveller - not necessarily premium travellers but people who will spend and disperse more whilst here. For instance, this includes young people coming to Australia and working.

Domestically we focus on all Australians but the key opportunity is young families (they do experiences and activities but have more financial pressure on them) and boomers who travel longer and have been less affected by COVID.

How do you navigate different territory regulations with global projects?

Mostly we rely on production companies and distributors in terms of content. But we also have our own teams in every territory, and we are all aware of different cultural norms that we must consider like modesty or showing of alcohol.

How has content creation evolved for you over the last decade?

It's getting more sophisticated with less product placement for instance. The plethora of new channels provides opportunity but brings with it so many choices - so pointy and relevant content becomes even more important.

Should production companies/ TV producers be taking more initiative in this area, or get in specialists? What would be your advice to those trying to navigate it for the first time?

We have been pitched a lot this year and I encourage proactivity – any progressive brand is open to hear a good idea. We are particularly looking for bigger and bolder ideas that break us out of category.

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INTERVIEW:

Phil Smith

CEO

Great Southern Pictures, New Zealand

Phil is responsible for creating 50% of all the shows Great Southern produces, and executive produces all the shows they have in production. Currently that is eight, including **The Apprentice NZ.**

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial or inevitable to financing current and future shows?

It's crucial because funding bodies are increasingly being asked for resources and are looking for producers to bring fresh and creative models to the table. In New Zealand we have one government funding body which is TVNZ On Air. However, NZ On Air only funds certain styles of programming, and don't fund the big entertainment formats.

As money is being squeezed, we must look at creative ways to get a show funded.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

Every model is different, however what you are looking for is a partnership model between the producer, the network and the brand/agency.

The key thing is around proving value. The big, younger brands want to see value and their brand across all platforms and see program integration as old school - like a diesel engine!

What are the obstacles/challenges? What is the impact on editorial/creative development?

There is an ongoing debate between agencies, brands, networks, and producers about proof of performance and the value you attach to that. We are still not there in articulating and agreeing what the metric is. It should be about brand experience and the whole ecosystem, however agencies just want to attribute a brand value.

Is there a sweet spot in terms of funding for broadcaster and producer to make money?

The sweet spot is when everyone is happy. The producer makes a profit, the brand conveys a great band experience, and the network sees good ratings and drives revenue or subscriptions.

Every show has a different funding model. Our company has a policy of getting the funding first which is probably why we have been around for 20 years.

Are there any categories that are more active in the content space now in NZ?

All the traditional markets are still spending - fast moving consumer goods, banking, insurance, vehicles etc. Airlines are spending less due to the impacts of COVID.

In New Zealand our issue can be that the agencies for the big brands have consolidated and have a regional approach operating out of

Dog Almighty

Sydney or Hong Kong, which can be an issue for the local markets in terms of relevance and storytelling.

What do you think is the motivation for brands to get involved in content creation?

It's a great way for brands to have that emotional experience and connection with the customer/ viewer.

How do you navigate different territory regulations with global projects?

It needs a strong and robust legal team who can accommodate all the regulations for each region into the deal and ensure that the different variations of the program are worked into the production budget.

How has BFP evolved in the last decade?

It has been pretty static due to the entrance of new players in the market and then the wild chase of the digital players. We are now seeing that curve come back as brands come back looking at traditional media "chasing $ not digital dimes".

Should production companies/ TV producers be taking more initiative in this area, or get in specialists? What would be your advice to those trying to navigate it for the first time?

Producers need to understand that it is the hardest form of production funding. They need to respect that they are working with a delicate 3rd party who is sensitive to their brand. It is about excellent relationship management and it adds cost and time. New producers should seek out the brand funding experts in the industry for guidance. It's tough to start with.

Do you have any useful lessons from any recent case studies you would like to share?

Dog Almighty is a show we recently created that's now an international format. It has a wide demo and high consumer spend which sit in the show, and on TVNZ extended into the ad breaks in the pet category. It's feel good and provides a great family experience. And agencies were able to bring clients to the filming of the show and make them really feel part of it.

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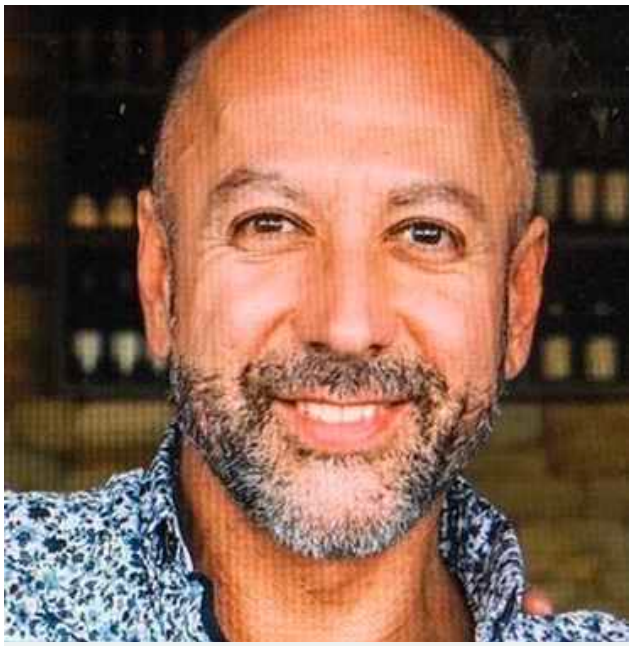

INTERVIEW:

Anthony Damianakis

Commercial Content Director

Boomtown Pictures, Australia

Anthony is an industry leader in content strategy, brand funded entertainment and owned channel development for some of the world's leading brands, broadcasters and media agencies spanning all major television networks and multi-platform digital media.

He has a relentless passion and genuine expertise for combining authentic and entertaining storytelling together with leading brands and their values, having created, developed and commercialised brand-funded entertainment formats that have achieved global distribution and industry acclaim.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

It's inevitable! Also important to financing shows is reimagining the current film and TV industry funding models, to encourage and understand the investment potential of brands in distribution. If we could bring together networks, brands and screen bodies (state and national) to the table, this could open up a new line of funding that further legitimises brand funded content as a means of driving production revenue, employment and creativity in Australia. The screen bodies have the opportunity to adapt their outdated finance modelling to assist in gap funding projects at scale.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

The most effective are where the broadcaster collaborates with the brand and its production partner from the outset editorially. From there the use of great talent that resonates and delivers additional reach works well to de-risk certain ideas from the beginning.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial?

The obstacles are often a lack of network's interest in anything new. They genuinely like to follow proven formats that work and sometimes this can limit the opportunity.

Is there a sweet spot in terms of funding for broadcaster and producer to make money?

It's horses for courses, however a co-funding model where the broadcaster shares the risk and reward with the brand and producer seems to be a positive model where everyone wins. The shared risk model between all parties is the ideal way to work.

Are there any categories that are more active in the content space at the moment in Australia?

Probably lifestyle, ob-docs and reality, and in particular "feel good" formats. In a post-pandemic environment they are attracting brand attention as they provide a storytelling platform

that is safe for a brand to start a conversation around. Retail, technology and domestic travel are all very strong at the moment.

What do you think is the motivation for brands to get involved in content creation?

The opportunity to own a conversation around a topic or subject matter, without having to outspend your competition using just advertising.

Are certain markets and demographics more receptive to BFP? Is that changing?

I think all markets are receptive to it – as evidenced by the UK really starting to come of age in this area of development, despite the rules and regulations around BFC that have been prohibitive. Evidence of this growth has been Channel 4 embracing observational formats that seamlessly integrate value-aligned storytelling with brands.

How do you navigate different territory regulations with global projects?

Ensure that the basis of the narrative that is developed by the producer and supported by brands can transcend markets. Good solid storytelling and great talent can cut through most markets.

How has BFP evolved in the last decade?

It's less about product placement now, and more about authenticity, the relevance of the brand association and resonance within the storytelling.

What impact has this last year had? Which types of brand have more/ less incentive and resource for this now?

COVID has opened up a whole new opportunity for "feel good" and inspirational stories that have been born out of being at home with our families. Homeware brands, retail, food, domestic travel art and craft as well as technology brands have all been some of the benefactors of this environment, which has brought us all together to value family and friends who are close to us.

Should production companies/ TV producers be taking more initiative in this area, or get in specialists? What would be your advice to those trying to navigate it for the first time?

Understand what the networks are looking for and, as I always like to say, what are the stories and shows that they would commission if they had the budget? This is always a positive foundation for a pitch and ensures time and money isn't wasted in the pitch process. It also opens up opportunities for alternative funding models that may be possible.

Stakeholder management is absolutely key in both proactively approaching the networks as well as managing expectations.

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CASE STUDY:

Taste of Australia with Hayden Quinn

2020

Channel 10, Qantas inflight entertainment and TV3 Mediaworks NZ

Produced during the middle of COVID, Taste of Australia with Hayden Quinn was developed and produced by Boomtown Pictures to help our tourism partners deliver the great pivot from international travel marketing to domestic travel and explore the people and stories in our backyard.

With the assistance of Tourism Australia and Destination NSW the series takes a story first approach to inspire travel domestically in Australia.

We partnered with wotif.com as a booking partner for series three to leverage the inspirational content, and drive bookings using associated advertising, digital, social and content around the programme rather than in-program. That helped achieve significant ROI for our brands, whilst delivering ratings success and international distribution for our broadcast partners.

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ASIA

INTERVIEW:

Steven Murphy

Managing Director APAC

Motion Content Group Asia (Motion)

Steven is responsible for leading Motion's local businesses across the region. His main focus is growing Motion's APAC business by launching new markets as well as increasing revenue in existing markets. His ability to develop and use innovative investment models while also identifying strong content and new opportunities has proved an asset for the Group as well as our many partners.

Most recently, Steven was the Director of Programming, APAC for GroupM Entertainment and has over 25 years of international industry success. He has an extensive track record in production, sales, acquisitions, and programming as both a distributor and a broadcaster. Steven draws on his wealth of experience from his time as the Director of Programming at the Asian Food Channel as well as the Vice President of Sales for Oasis International.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

By and large, Motion has historically not been a brand-facing business. Rather, we have a number of commercial approaches to funding and producing content that sees us working with some of the best producers around the world to support our channel and platform partners' content aspirations. However, because we are part of GroupM and WPP we are continuously looking for ways to create opportunities for the Group's clients/brands, or in some cases even co-investing with them. Our aim is to invest in content to create value and opportunities for our partners and clients, and we use this a lens to evaluate all proposals brought our way.

An example of this is the current **MasterChef Singapore** season 2 production, where Motion's investment funds a production that provides opportunities for clients/brands to sponsor. Mediacorp's sales team has been very happy about the opportunity to sell sponsorships around a second season of one of their most successful English language shows. In this case, the sponsorships in the APAC region are not so much funding the show as much as they are creating a revenue stream for the channel which is equally important – it's not so much about the show as the longevity of the channels and supporting the overall media ecosystem.

As media spends continue to drift from Free-to-air (FTA) networks to online, it is becoming more and more important to create premium content opportunities for brands to bring their money to our channel partners to keep them vibrant and operational.

In this case, our channel partners can work with any brand, not just GroupM's clients. That said, we do give first look to GroupM clients which gives them a competitive advantage. At the

same time, our investment is driving value for the platforms and channels.

For **MasterChef Singapore** season 2, we are hoping for a ROI, but in terms of the show, Season 1 is always a fishing expedition. You don't expect to come back with your boat full. A better analogy could be putting your goods on display in your department store window and letting the pedestrians go by, see your goods, and maybe come in and buy something. Season 1 was incredibly successful, it drove fantastic ratings, even with very desirable demographics that had largely left the channel and meWatch (Mediacorp's streaming platform) but came back in droves to watch. Numbers went from a few people watching live with most on catchup, and as the show grew, this audience moved over to the live show on Sunday night. People were engaged in the outcome of each episode.

It was the first time in a long time that Channel 5 had that kind of audience and these great ratings led to an order for Season 2, providing the Mediacorp sales team the demand to sell far more packages for Season 2.

In terms of the uptake in auditions for Season 2, there is a higher level of engagement as well. There is continued support and engagement from the fans, and growth in ratings is projected. It also seems that there will be a decent return for the channel, although it's still early to predict as we've only just started shooting.

What is the impact on the editorial?

If the idea for the content is conceived and funded by the brand and they are the point of inception, then there is going to be a lot more input into the editorial as opposed to a sponsorship or integration deal on a format such as with **MasterChef Singapore**. The format owner has a lot more say about how many integrations and the general shape of those integrations.

We've had very successful experiences of brand sponsorships where Motion has co-funded a production with a client, which has resulted in a win-win for all parties involved. In this type of scenario Motion can use its funding arrangements with a channel using its own money to fund the production and focus on the quality of the program. Meanwhile the brand can not only save money by sharing the overall cost with Motion, it can focus its investment on the media buy, and create a program that achieves the brand's objectives.

Of course, we shouldn't forget about barter deals either. In the case of **MasterChef,** the production team needed to acquire different items for the set such as plates, whisks, and stand mixers, etc. Rather than buy them we can source them in exchange for logos in the closing credits, seeing our contestants using them, and even ensuring that logos show up on screen from time to time. For example, Ariston provided us with cookers and refrigerators in Season 1 in return for prominent logo placement when the contestants opened the fridge or put something in the oven. This was not over the top visually and it won't make any money for the channel, it just offsets costs. The sales team aims to bring these companies on as full-time sponsors but barring that, we try to secure these barter deals.

Are certain markets or demographics more receptive to BFP?

If you look at certain markets around APAC, the kinds of content/branded content delivered on a local basis differ from market to market. What audiences are willing to accept in terms of brand integration into content versus a general sponsorship is vastly different to what you would see in the UK, US or Canada. From the most in your face to very subtle, seamless examples.

But specifically, in terms of branded content, there is a decrease in the overall funding of these deals. Where you might have seen a brand such as Unilever fund 100% of a local

version of **Got Talent** five years ago, I don't see that kind of thing happening as much now. And if it does happen, it tends to be for short digital content or as a package within a larger programme. It's rarer these days to see them fund 100% of long form content, regardless of the genre.

This is a trend driven in part by the brands themselves looking at this space and saying that they want more direct engagement with their customers and then typically following them to social media.

It's not that sponsorships and brand funded content has completely disappeared, it has just changed. On the one hand, spends are drifting to social media where brands are funding short form content. On the other, there are fewer global formats such as **Got Talent** being rolled out. There are still some great formats to be had, but there is, as I have said, less money coming from brands to pay for these expensive programs.

Part of the decline in new global formats has been due to a global shift of focus to drama. The streamers, both local and global are helping to drive this trend but make no mistake, FTA prime time schedules across APAC are stacked with domestic drama. Drama is not the natural home for product integrations. Fewer opportunities to capture the larger audience exacerbates the situation that sees brands drifting to short form content online.

That said, 'outcome TV', programming such as live sports or formats such as **MasterChef** where there are immediate results, is still quite viable for FTA channels. These types of shows can deliver a sizeable, desirable audience and provide opportunities to bring sponsors on board. This is where Motion can help - our funding can remove some of the risk that is involved in funding larger formats (or even dramas for that matter). In addition, Motion's experience in this space, our relationship to advertisers through GroupM, and our flexible commercial structures give us the know-how to deliver successful content that drives ratings and incremental revenue for our production and channel partners as well as, in many cases, the brands themselves.

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INTERVIEW:

Donovan Chan

Creative Director

and

Phillson Rajan

Head of Beach House Labs

Beach House Pictures, Singapore

CASE STUDY:

Ed Stafford: First Man Out

Season 2

Discovery/ Bilibili, China

Our second season of Discovery's **Ed Stafford: First Man Out** was a co-pro with Bilibili, and shot entirely in China. It won Best Branded Series at the Asian Academy Creative Awards.

It was an interesting experience in terms of brand funded programming and we definitely learnt a lot. Having shot the first season in UHD/ 4K - already a challenge for a survival show - the second season was shot in the same format, but with the new challenge that we had to make two versions. And bear in mind that this is not a scripted show – everything just happens.

The reason we did two versions was that in China (with Bilibili as the partner), there was a brand funded approach to the production meaning that we had two main brands investing in the show: Chevy (Chevrolet) and also an outdoors brand called HX Outdoors. HX Outdoors were promoting a series of knives used for adventuring in China and Chevy was promoting a new four-wheel drive.

For the international version with Discovery, Ofcom rules and other country regulations meant that there was no room for this type of branding discussion, so we were making an original series. The big challenge was to find room for both versions on the same shoot which was not easy but thankfully the language difference helped.

It was a double-edged sword for us – on the one hand yes, it was hard to produce a Chinese version for China and an English version for international but it also gave us the advantage of being able to create our own branded solutions, meaning that we only had to create branded inserts for one language version of the series.

This way we were able to distinguish all the Chinese shooting with the Chinese course architect (essentially the main guy that sets the route for Ed Stafford and his competitor). We had a Chinese course architect and an international course architect and a team purely focused on shooting the visual assets for Chevy as well as show inserts etc. Then we worked with the main editorial team to figure out what the Chinese version of the hour programme would look like with all of the branded elements. We then created a look book which explored how the brand would be integrated into future seasons.

This was the first survival series to air in China and therefore the first branded survival series to be pushed out into this territory. We proved that survival shows do work in China and we also proved that branded survival shows also work there. And ultimately that it was possible to make two different versions and still make the Chinese version feel appropriate by making sure the Chinese characters worked well together with the international characters.

So we crossed a lot of barriers with that one project and learnt so much about how the Chinese love branded content and how these models can work for future productions. And since then, we have advised many projects on how to execute similar productions.

We will continue to work with Discovery on this type of survival show and definitely the learnings that we have gained will help us when working on brand funded content with other networks/ other co-production partners.

How has the appetite for BFP evolved recently?

One trend that we have noticed in the brand funded space is that IP is being produced directly with the brand and together we seek out the platform. This model has become increasingly popular.

Brands regularly reach out to us directly wanting to explore the creation of an IP that they can own. We then loop in a channel that we feel could work for the project and consequently we create a three-way partnership. So instead of going through a middleman, brands come to Beach House directly to create the concept from the ground up and work together to find the platform partner. We see this happening much more now.

The reason being that certain ideas and certain levels of budgets require different approaches and not every budget will fit the channel model. It's a big playground and everyone gets to have a swing - it depends on the opportunity and the appropriate approach.

If we take **MasterChef Singapore** (produced for Mediacorp with Motion Content and Banijay), this is more of a traditional ad sales model with a great format, perfect for advertising. These formats will always suck the oxygen out of the room in terms of attracting great sponsors and this is a tried and tested model that still works really well with right audience numbers and the right brands.

CASE STUDY:

Record Rides

2 x 30 series, 2019

Nat Geo

We had two drivers with a mission to put pedal to the medal and basically set a Guinness World Record using cars that they have figured out how to modify/build. It's a classic car show, (lots of fun, with great characters), and an example of how a programme can serve as the flagship content piece for the brand. And from there, an entire campaign was created by the agency around the series itself.

We created the idea and all the partners got so excited about it that they were able to build a very coherent campaign around it that was extremely successful for the brand and the channel. Ultimate win-win where the brand Caltex was integrated cleverly into the storytelling. This is only achievable in Asia, where audiences are more open to this type of content and where the rules aren't as strict as say the Ofcom rules in the UK.

Are certain markets or demographics more receptive to BFP?

Branded content is not new – it can be found everywhere online. Audiences are just more savvy. They can tell the difference between branded and non-branded. They can choose to watch **Record Rides** for example because they like a certain character, or they can choose to switch it off and watch a drama on Netflix. At the end of the day, it's all about knowledge and entertainment. Audiences have been fed such great content that it's the producers and sponsors' responsibility: if they want to reach the right audiences, they need to come up with the right content at a high quality. If you don't, you might as well play the YouTube or Facebook game and fight with the multitude of other videos online that people are making money on.

Audiences know how to distinguish and separate the facts. The difference is that in the factual game, we don't play with the facts. With scripted, you can use your imagination, but with factual, the concept has to be clever enough to hold the integrity of the brand and the channel.

There has also been a mindset change within brands. There is a very outdated notion that if you want to make attention-grabbing content it has to be under two minutes, but over the last few years - with an increasing number of people binge

watching – quality has become the most important factor. We see this with some of our content that has performed remarkably well online, and some of it isn't even brand funded such as **China from Above**, which achieved 200 million views online within the first six days. Brands are finally breaking away from the idea that content has to be shorter for a digital audience.

What are the regulations in the territories you work in?

Basic rules apply here in Singapore regarding pornography and certain products - there are certain things we can't touch with a barge pole and rightly so, but generally in Asia people have a more open mind and the territories are less regulated. The environment is less restricted.

However we are an international producer based in Singapore and work regularly with Japan, China, Australia, US, and UK and depending on the show/commission, we need to adapt to the rules. It's true that there is more leeway in Singapore and China but for example it is just as difficult to do a branded push on a piece of kids programming as it is in the UK. It's not a free for all in China.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial or creative development?

Having multiple partners is a constant challenge – you have the producer, the platform where the content sits and the brand paying for the content. The challenge is for everyone to understand the common goal and this becomes more pronounced when you are trying to create something relatively sophisticated. At the end of the day, it's just not as simple as putting a tube of toothpaste in the story anymore. The approach is far more complex, the brand needs to fall into the story so as producers, we need to explain to the brand or the platform and hold their hands without making them feel confused or told what to do because that's not why we're there – we just want make a great show and tell a good story. The human challenges are still there.

On a technical and conceptual level, that's our role - the producer is there to solve these issues. It's always about finding a common ground and these issues will only be solved if the partners have an open mind. If they come into the project, guns blazing with a set of rules or precedents, you will always have issues. We almost have to have the approach of "we don't know what we're doing until we do it, so let's figure it out together."

As for COVID protocol productions, for the short and long term, as producers, you need to be a tried and tested partner. The platforms need to trust the producers and the producers also need to trust the platforms to protect the IP that is brought to table. The platforms and the co-production partners need to know that as a producer, you are going to be a responsible entity when it comes to keeping people safe but also keeping the brand safe.

Once you bring a brand in, you're not just protecting the IP of the show, but also the brand which is entrusting you with its sponsorship dollars and the product and knows that you won't tarnish that by playing fast and loose with other things. This trust is so important moving forward.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

Every platform has a different strategy but ultimately, we need to offer a balance. At Beach House, we do both, even in our Beach House Labs department responsible for branded content, because the brand doesn't want to be seen to be overtly front and centre of the show.

Some brands want to be the show but we have the responsibility as producers to argue that no one is going to watch this product for 60

minutes, you still need to tell a good story and entertain the audience. So often we have to find solutions for this. The brands and the agency need to get savvier and realise that the branded story is not just a 30 second ad, you need to tell a story that people are getting used to. Longer form content will suck people in for the long term.

Not every story is going to work for a branded conversation - like true crime for example.

There is a certain lack of knowledge across the board regarding the time and effort necessary for these projects. During the early conversations, we are approached by brands who say “we love this, we want to do this” and then they realise the multiple moving parts and time necessary and say “let’s table the conversation, we’re not ready yet.” Or they come in with something small and work their way up. People definitely want to find out more and learn about this space.

Producers and platforms need to be included early. Previously, you would treat the producer as a vendor, you have the brand, you have the celebrity, you just need someone to shoot this video but this old school mentality is gone. If you want something premium to be the centre piece of your campaign, it needs to be done from the ground up with good storytellers. The partners need to understand the narrative from the beginning and audiences are super savvy. You need to get the messaging and story right, get the partners in early and treat it as a team effort, create the merchandising, campaign, roll out of the product, content push out, visual assets. Everything has to be a 360 concurrent manoeuvre.

The partners need to understand and trust the process – this comes with experience.

Campaigns these days need to be so much more sophisticated and entertaining for the viewer. With the streamers coming into play and investing in premium content, the quality of the game has gone up, either you’re in the premier league or you stay down in the divisions and play with what you know, but if you want to get the lion’s share of the audience, you need to work in that way.

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INTERVIEW:

Choo Huei Miin

Director,
Digital & Content Marketing Group

and

Lim Shoo Ling

Director,
Brand Marketing Group

Singapore Tourism Board

CASE STUDY:

Singapore Tourism Board's SG Stories Content Fund

In early 2020, The Singapore Tourism Board launched the SG Stories Content Fund "to empower content creators in Singapore and around the world to tell amazing stories of Singapore – as a destination, as a home that we love, and as a place where our passions shine

Ms Choo Huei Miin assumed the position of Director, Digital & Content on 1 January 2020. In this role, she oversees the content development and digital initiatives of STB. Huei Miin was previously Director, Visitor Experience from July 2014 to 31 December 2019. In this capacity, Huei Miin led her team's efforts to enhance the experience of visitors to Singapore through a customised and user-centric approach across all STB touchpoints. Prior to this, Huei Miin served as Regional Director, Europe from February 2012 to July 2014. She oversaw the operations and in-market activities that were carried out by STB's Frankfurt, London and Moscow regional offices to promote Singapore as a compelling destination.

Ms Lim Shoo Ling was appointed Director, Brand in January 2016. In this capacity, she manages the Singapore tourism destination brand and the brand campaign across markets. Prior to this, she was Director, Strategic Marketing & Brand, and oversaw the Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) marketing budgets and global agency contracts, and cultivation of multifaceted strategic partnerships that extend across regions, industries and functions. Under her leadership, notable projects include developing and launching the Passion Made Possible（心想狮城）brand; partnerships with Changi Airport Group and Singapore Airlines, Trip Advisor, and Mastercard; and the Golden Jubilee campaign to celebrate Singapore's 50th anniversary. Shoo Ling has amassed some twenty years of experience with the STB.

We are interested in understanding the value of this initiative to the STB brand. Could you tell us more about STB's desire to invest in this type of collaboration?

Harnessing the power of great storytelling is an important aspect of STB's marketing efforts. Through this endeavour, the SG Stories Content Fund was intended to catalyse and support ground-up content from creative businesses to tourism industries; telling great stories authentically about the destination.

This would not only support their storytelling efforts but also maintain destination recall and deepen our audiences' understanding about Singapore as a destination. This initiative and collaboration with the content creators also brought new perspectives and attention to the hidden gems and trades of Singapore, as well as Singaporeans who are dedicated to their passions and crafts.

Do you feel that the SG Stories target a particular demographic?

The supported content under the SG Stories Content Fund was intended to resonate with and appeal to both local and global audiences. Through a variety of stories – from mini-documentaries to heart-warming profile stories and reality series – that touch on topics like our food, culture or even nightlife, we hope to showcase Singapore's spirit of unity and resilience to a diverse audience.

What are the challenges and regulations?

It was important for the stories to be able to bring forth the destination narrative, while keeping strictly to filming and production guidelines for safety reasons during COVID-19 and Circuit Breaker [lockdown].

The supported projects had managed to exercise creativity in their storytelling – including capturing content that could evoke a deep connection to the destination and inspiring the wanderlust of travel to Singapore soon through creative video formats like animations and projection mapping onto common spaces – all while keeping to strict filming and production guidelines.

Can you tell us how the project is working out so far?

It was heartening to receive over 550 applications within a span of four weeks, each displaying creativity in different areas, making the selection process a highly competitive one. Awarded proposals were selected based on the Fund's published criteria and a total of 20 projects were eventually supported – with applicants across creative agencies/production houses, tourism/industry stakeholders, media platforms as well as individual freelancers.

The projects were progressively delivered and shared across various platforms, including applicants' own channels, third-party sites and STB's owned channels. The videos have since garnered positive interest and engagement, with steady reach and views amongst locals as well as audiences across Southeast Asia.

Do you see STB investing more in branded content going forward? Can you share any details on other initiatives?

People do not remember facts, but they remember stories. Branded Content will continue to be an important component of STB's marketing strategy and execution as it enables us to establish deeper connections with our audience through unique stories that appeal to different interests. Through these efforts, we look to strengthen the appeal and appreciation of Singapore amongst our audiences.

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INTERVIEW:

Vaibhav Modi

Managing Director

Victor Tango, India

Vaibhav Modi is a producer, writer, lyricist and format creator who has to his credit award winning series like Times of Music, It's Not That Simple, TVF Tripling and many more in the pipeline for leading platforms. Prior to founding his own content company Victor Tango Entertainment, Vaibhav has held various positions at Endemol India (Creative Director, India), Star Plus (Programming Head, Non-scripted), Bolt Media (CEO), MTV Networks (Associate Director) amongst others and has created, written and executive produced more than 50 shows. He has featured as a lyricist on Coke Studio and is an Environmental Sciences graduate and an MBA by education

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

AFP is inevitable for brands – advertising is dying and consumers are engaging with brands and programming in a very different way now. As an example, the recent **Times of Music** format got a shot in the arm when Smule, the karaoke app, jumped on board before the show was completed and aired on MX Player. The brands really are the enabler and can provide critical funding to good ideas.

This is an important balance to achieve. Working in the digital space is more efficient in that content is not bound by durations, multiple stakeholders and slot fees etc.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial and creative development?

The biggest obstacle is the process that is routed through the brand agencies. The content studios bring the brand, the media/platform and the production company under one roof. The content studios are paid by the brand and are therefore overprotective of the brand's interests and getting six stakeholders (brand, brand's creative agency, the brand's media agency, the platform's ad sales team, the agency and the production company) aligned is challenging. It's more of a wedding than anything else! The brand spend amount is always proportionate to the direct ROI they can get out of the project so capturing the essence of the brand is sometimes detrimental to the creative storytelling.

However, some brands in the digital space – new age, tech-based businesses - have succeeded in creating sharper, genuinely integrated AFP. **Permanent Roommates** is a good example. As India's first web series, season two was produced in association with Ola cabs (India's Uber/Grab taxi service). It's a situational comedy by online digital

entertainment company The Viral Fever, following the lives of a young couple who move in together and with the entertaining Ola-driver character seamlessly woven into the story.

Are certain markets or demographics more receptive to AFP?

If the story is good, it doesn't matter if a brand is associated. If we look at the biggest successes in India, an example is one of our longest running shows called **Roadies*** on MTV, sponsored by Hero Honda Motorcyles [*A youth based reality show, first aired in 2003, and featuring a group of contestants travelling to different destinations and participating in various tasks that challenge their physical, social and mental strength.]

The brand was very prominent, bikes featured on the show and were given away as gratification but it didn't affect the creative. Literally everyone wanted to be on that show and it appealed to a wide demographic.

Has the appetite for AFP changed recently?

There has definitely been a shift in the last few years and renewed interest. Digital has really freed up the landscape. If I have a great idea, I can reach out to a brand directly; co-creation is more possible today.

It is a matter of finding the right person to talk to and having the leverage in that conversation to get that person excited and invest in the idea.

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INTERVIEW:

Urvashi Khanna

Head of Content

Lenskart, India

Urvashi Khanna started her career as a journalist where she developed an inclination towards branded story telling. In a career span of 13 years, Urvashi has written, directed & produced over 50 branded content pieces for clients ranging from automobile to FMCG. Productising content offerings, strategically aligning it to marketing objectives, effective dissemination of content through media partnership, and weaving all of this through a great narrative in an engaging format is what she loves. She recently joined Lenskart as Head of Content.

Lenskart is an Indian optical marketplace that has recently launched in Singapore and the US. It has over 550 stores in 70 cities in India, six in Singapore and will be opening stores in the US shortly. Urvashi is Ex-Content lead, Publicis Media, India and has recently joined Lenskart as Head of Content.

Which models of brand funding have you been involved with and found to be effective?

When pitching an original concept to a client, we present the simple maths:

The brand needs visibility at all costs and the least risky way is the sponsorship model; the brand becomes an associate sponsor of a show, or you take the storytelling the branded content way.

With sponsorship, the brand has visibility and it's someone else's risk, someone else's money. This is the model that 90% of the brands want to float – the marketeers can justify their investments at the end of the year.

Slowly, the brands are realising however that the sponsorship models are very cluttered. They cannot afford an exclusive solo deal, so there are usually five-six brands on the same show, and we are reaching the masses but not necessarily the audience we are targeting. If they need to express their brand creatively and exclusively, they need to go solo. With BFP, we curate content so that we are reaching a specific target audience. The brand's name and philosophy is integrated into the piece of content which is obviously not possible with the sponsorship model.

While pitching branded content to clients, my favourite case study has been Coke Studio. India and Pakistan are culturally vibrant and the brand's consumers are young, and highly influenced by music. The campaign launched in 2008 in Pakistan and three years later in India. The format is simple and the branding is done explicitly on the stage but is not an eyesore. Live studio-recorded music performances recreate contemporary versions of old folk songs or fresh compositions by established as well as emerging artists. It is the longest-running annual television music show in Pakistan, running annually since 2008. And what made it possible – the audience. Branded content is as much for the brand as it is for the audiences.

CASE STUDY:

Teacher's Whisky: Teacher's Genuine Stories

Sep 2019

Times Network and Viu

For Teacher's the challenge was to cleverly tell the brand story and to avoid sole reference to the Teacher's brand/logo on screen. Alcohol falls into the "dark category" given that its advertising is banned in India. So taking the log line of the brand – "Genuine is rare" - became a powerful tool to explore.

Hence the the idea was to make long form content series dedicated to Genuine stories that originated in India and highlighted the brand's expression of "being authentic, real & one of its kind" in the category. We translated that through the choice of our anchor – an unconventional actor, and also the talent who we featured in the show, from slum hip hop artists – Mumbai's Finest to the actress/poetess Priya Malik. The anchor Rahul Bose travelled across India to find & meet these storytellers and what we created at the end were stunning journeys with soulful performance. As the brand's motto is #genuineisrare we were careful to not pick known talents but to search for talent groups or individuals who are harder to find.

Visually we needed to reach 5-6 regions that were the critical brand markets for Teachers. With each episode shot on location in these key regions, we made a very physical connection with the audience and local audiences got excited about the show.

CASE STUDY:

Jeep:
Jeep Bollywood trails

Jan 2020

AXN and Sony Liv

Jeep globally is also a future forward brand, and pitching an original concept needed strong groundwork. The SUV market is a really cluttered category in India and Jeep needed visibility at all costs. The most preferred and least risky way is to take the sponsorship model; the brand becomes a title or associate sponsor for a show. OR you take the more challenging way of telling your brand's story through branded content.

Jeep did both: they not only took sponsorships of shows that were relevant for popularity, and we tailored brand integration into the show content, but they also made their first ever branded content show – **Jeep Bollywood Trails**. The show moved beyond brand integration, it was a creative rendition of their brand pillars - Adventure, Freedom, Passion & authenticity in its true sense. The show was also strategically launched on an English lifestyle channel, knowing that the audience would be limited. But we wanted to reach out the most relevant consumers, not everyone. The show was hosted by Bollywood actress, Zareen Khan, an avid traveller herself. At the core the show explored locations that famous Bollywood directors have made iconic through their blockbuster films. The host travelled to these locations in Jeep, covered the local regional nuances & also interviewed people who are famous in the region. For the brand to resonate more, the host explored the cultural heritage of the different regions, and ate the local food, which obviously permitted the target audience to connect with the Indian arm of Jeep.

With sponsorship, the brand got visibility and with branded content it created brand love.

Are certain markets or demographics more receptive to AFP?

In Asia, the audiences are complex and very diverse. Taking India as an example, the country is so vast and diverse culturally – just how much content can you create?

You can create a mainland product in English which can sit across all assets, your consumer will discover it but when you want to appeal to the individual regional audiences, you need to be supported by the sponsorship model and be associated with general entertainment properties which are aimed at the masses.

This is my disconnect. So, no matter how beautiful or appealing the end product is, ultimately, it boils down to the numbers achieved, how much it was shared on social media, what were people talking about, what were the social listening numbers, what were the ratings etc.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial or creative development?

Branded content has a much longer gestation period and the clients can lose interest or change their marketing objective or the worst – cut down their budgets. Every month, you need to engage with scratch videos and mood boards, so the clients gets the flavour of what you are trying to create.

Has the appetite for AFP changed recently?

For the agencies, yes. BFP is very interesting as it creates noise in the industry, and there is more money on the table which means a bigger canvas to play with. It's definitely a viable model as you either do 200 projects or you do one big show and filter the brands that are likely to invest and are interested.

Going forward, during this period of the 'new normal', more attention definitely has been given to BFP, and many brands are making content in-house too.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

Advertising for India is still quantified by the number of views whereas in other parts of the world, people really want to indulge with the brand in terms of the story. Storytelling is however picking up in India.

For the channel, it's easy revenue, they are getting content without spending, technically a win-win for them. I predict a gear change and more of an appetite for this type of content

From the brand's point of view, during the pandemic, they need to explore the value of content. If we consider consumer engagement, they need to stay relevant in peoples' mind, and remain part of consumer's purchase journey.

Also channels stopped production, relied on reruns, and cannot expect the same money from advertisers who will not pay the full amount for repeats. A 22-minute episode will have approximately 20 brands advertising so there is no opportunity for brand recall. The brands realise that they need to be the content creators, be it short or long form and need to keep on creating bank of content to be relevant. You have to be present in multiple forums and in multiple ways.

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INTERVIEW:

Sameer Gogate

Business Head

BBC Studios, India

Sameer Gogate is the Business Head of BBC Studios in India, the studio behind big shows like Top Gear, Dancing with the Stars, Doctor Foster, Seven Worlds One Planet to name just a few. BBC Studios India has been responsible for many hit shows in India from numerous seasons of **Jhalak Dikhla Ja** *to recent hits like* **Criminal Justice** *and* **Out of Love**.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

I think it's an important part of the mix and as a production unit, we need all options whether it's a broadcaster, advertiser or SVOD driven model.

Certain brand categories depend exclusively on certain models for creating content such as the alcohol brands which are a very important part of the ecosystem but alcohol advertising is banned in India.

Prior to BBC Studios in my role as Head of Monetisation at Vuclip, Mindshare along with Viu created a franchise called **No 1 Yaari** with one of the big whisky brands in India, McDowells (part of the UB group). This was a chat show on friendship which tied in well with their core brand philosophy and messaging. The broadcasters were happy because the show attracted big celebrities - it was not about promoting the alcohol brand – it was about friendship.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

The simplest model is where a brand through its media buying agency will approach a producer to create the BFP. In this case, as a producer, we are only responsible for the creation of the content and not involved on where it gets aired. The agency is responsible for putting it on a platform.

Another model is where a brand and a platform approach us together. This is what largely happens in the TV world where a StarPlus or a Colors would come to us and say this is an AFP slot and we are looking to create a programme for a particular advertiser – would you come up with ideas?

Largely it's between these two models – very rarely does a brand approach us and ask us to produce a piece of content. Although at the moment, we have a lot of interest from brands in the eco, preservation, nature space. Outdoor gear and environment conscious brands are keen to invest in BFP on the preservation of the environment with a focus on climate and nature.

We're currently working on a series on the lost fish of the Himalayas. This will be a series starting in the Himalayas and then will go on to the rivers around India highlighting the different species of fish risking extinction.

What are the obstacles?

The beauty of the classic model is that it's just the platform and the producer with one or two visions at the most. The producer pitches his/her idea to the platform and the parties agree.

In the brand funded model, the value chain is slightly longer with the brands, agencies, channels and a producer and it becomes at times difficult to manage everyone's expectations. But we have enough good examples too when this same value chain comes together to deliver some great content.

Is there a sweet spot in terms of funding for broadcaster and producer to make money?

At BBC Studios, we have made a host of BFP – for example the format **The House That Made Me**. This was an incredibly successful series produced with Asian Paints for multiple seasons.

We also produced an award winning series **I Can You Can** for a pharmaceutical company that wanted to promote Nicotex (NRT gum for people who want to quit smoking). The six-episode show follows three smokers and three ex-smokers who were chosen from a multitude of online entries to do a trek to the Everest basecamp, hosted by fitness expert Milind Soman.

These were both successful in that the investment into the content paid off for both the brand and the broadcaster – the series were heavily promoted by both partners. When we look at content spends, we used to see brands as the extra pockets – the brand money that went straight to production.

However, in this COVID economy I don't see that extra pocket having left anything. They would rather spend on their standard channels and standard marketing plans. I don't see them going out to create extra noise around content. It's easier for the brands to put some money on an existing IP rather than than creating a new property themselves.

Are certain markets and demographics more receptive to BFP? Is that changing?

For the demographics, I think it's all down to the brand's target audience. Look at **Stupid Man Smart Phone** – A Voot original in India and Singaporean version on Channel 5. A great example of BFP – once we knew the brand and the platform, it was easy to cater to a specific target audience. We work with the demographic of the brand and in this case created a dynamic show for the target audience.

How has BFP evolved in the last decade?

In India, BFP has moved more into the regional markets. Previously, it was very much mainstream for the Hindi speaking audience. **No 1 Yaari** was made in Hindi version (**No. 1 Yaari Jam**), but also produced by Mindshare in Telugu (as **No.1 Yaari with me Rana**), Kannada and Marathi languages. This enabled them to penetrate the different states and target different pockets which is far more efficient and targeted. This is definitely something I've seen happening more in the past four years.

What would be your advice to those trying to navigate this area for the first time?

They need to know that it takes a while, BFP projects are not an overnight deal – these deals take months to put together and need a lot of patience. The decision-making process for the property is lengthy - from the brands to the agencies to the producers then back to the agency and the channel/platform. BFP is a big investment and it takes its own time.

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INTERVIEW:

Deepak Dhar

CEO and Founder

Banijay Asia

Deepak Dhar leads Banijay's new business, content strategies, partnerships and alliances across the region starting with India. Within a short span, Banijay Asia already has some notable additions to the bouquet of content like **ARRived** *(first digital show for YouTube India Originals with AR Rahman),* **Roar of The Lion** *(the comeback story of Chennai Super Kings recited by MS Dhoni),* **The Kapil Sharma Show**, **Masters of Taste** *with* **Gary Mehigan**, **Hostages** *(Season 1 &2),* **Parchhayee** *(a horror anthology series by Ruskin Bond),* **Myntra Fashion Superstar** *(India's first digital reality show judged by Sushmita sen and Manish Malhotra),* **Nach Baliye** *(with Raveena Tandon as the judge), Into* **The Wild With Bear Grylls** *(with Superstar Rajinikanth and Akshay Kumar), and* **The Voice India**.

He exited as managing director of EndemolShine India in December 2017 and was instrumental in helping the company grow across the film, television and digital units, with more than 250 shows and 10,000 plus hours of programming including **Big Boss**, **Khatron k Khiladi**, **Masterchef India**, **Deal or No Deal**, *etc and films like* **Traffic**, **Te3N** *and* **Brothers**.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing current and future shows?

I have always advocated brand funded shows, this is something that I have been pushing for many years now, including during my early years at Endemol when we did many shows funded by Unilever and Pepsi. Recently we completed **Myntra Fashion Superstar** which has gone straight into season 2 so we have really been the flag bearers for a long time both in the unscripted and scripted space.

It's all out of enthusiasm to create IP not only for broadcasters/platforms (our clients), but also for brands who are looking for solutions to help them reach out to their audiences and cater to their needs. There is such a wide audience in India – everyone wants to target a different niche with specialised content. So we are constantly trying to break new ground, getting brands on board to see the power and merit of long form content.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

Rather than getting into the investment model, it's all about the enthusiasm of the brand; the minute the enthusiasm is there, some brands want to walk the full mile and really want to create content and own the IP and we then look out for a broadcast partner to come on board, some who just want to invest partially.

Preferred model/option is obviously – two is company, three is a crowd… It's always good to create for one brand and have straight dialogue with that one brand but we are not only talking about advertiser funded/brand funded programmes, we are talking about meaningful and entertaining content, and seeing the brand values through that. Ultimately, it shouldn't feel like a brand funded show, it should feel like a programme that is being made to reach out to a wide audience that can engage with the content.

That's why the majority of our clients come to Banijay – because they really want to make

entertaining content – not AFP which in my opinion really defeats the purpose of really engaging with the wider audience and entertaining them. Once they are enthusiastic about your idea and ready to walk the talk, the investment and questions on how the programme is going to get funded all fall into place.

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial and creative development?

I don't see specific challenges – this is a different space. Many brand managers are curious about long form content now. The advertising 30- 60 second format is more of a push mechanism whereas BFP is more of a pull because once the show entertains the audience, people will start to notice the brand and its values. So it's a different strategy - I see that more and more people are open to this content and creating directly for brands.

At Endemol we created a talent show called **Ren Megastar Superstar**. Ren is part of the Unilever ecosystem and they wanted to create a kids talent show where the mothers play an important role in the show. A kid is obviously not going to buy the detergent – it's the mother. So, we put the mother at the centre of the format and it really worked out well. And the brand got really excited about taking it to the next level because it was our idea to widen the campaign and reach out to a general entertainment audience and not just a restricted niche audience.

We also worked for Pepsi on one of their snack brands Fritolay, with celebrities from different walks of life spending a day in the life of an ordinary man, and an ordinary man spending a day in the life of a celebrity. This immediately caught a lot of attention – it was just a 4-episode crossover format. In the early days we did a lot of this.

Another example is a show we made for the Fair and Lovely brand which is a famous lightening cream which always get a lot of attention. We then made **Myntra Fashion Superstar** during the early days of Banijay Asia which was launched on the Myntra app and then later on MTV and Voot.

The idea was something that Myntra had been evaluating because it was such a successful e-commerce brand, obviously they wanted to engage with more audiences to come to their app. We spent time building and co-developing the show with Myntra, who were very collaborative and have become a strong partner that really believes in the show. We are going to be doing a lot more for them with other formats and also scripted shows.

So we have worked on a string of examples of BFP where we really pushed the envelope of making an entertaining show first and foremost. People have to come for the entertainment and not feel the brand push, they want to feel it has been created for them.

What impact has this last year had?

Over the past year we have seen strong renewed interest. Given the challenging circumstances in the last six-eight months, obviously it's important to have brands, telecast partners and broadcast partners excited, so I think this year has been a year of unlearning and doing new things in a different way. There has been more of a focus on cost, and push back on revenue – definitely challenging but I think when we come out on the other side we will be much stronger as individual creators/companies, purely because we will have really weathered the storm and will have much tighter cost control.

I should highlight our strategic partnership with Motion Content Group - something that has really been a big focus area with our partners to create more BFP. Motion bring in market intelligence, guiding principles into what brands are looking for and we bring in creative input on what the show should look like and what the broadcasters and platforms are looking for. So

as we bring all these learnings together the partnership has already produced a couple of shows, and we are going to be doing a lot more. The idea is to move into scripted, where the brand is going to be very organic and key to the storyline. A lot of these ideas have already been seeded in the last year - we're itching to get into production but obviously plans have been delayed a little and we're looking at Q1 2021. * details to follow

What would be your advice to those trying to navigate it for the first time?

Remember that it's about creating a great entertaining show: the rest of the financing puzzle will fall into place, as long as enthusiasm around the idea, format, concept and execution for the mass audience is there. As long as those boxes are being ticked, every stakeholder in the room will be happy.

That's really the first sign of really having something that could be franchised and built into a seasonal property - use their skills, do what they know, create a beautiful entertaining show.

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CASE STUDY:

Jammin'

2020

ColorsTV

Jammin is a musical extravaganza that caters to music lovers across the Hindi heartland, with top Bollywood musicians paired with digital stars to create unique musical experiences. Watch here

CASE STUDY:

Ladies Vs. Gentlemen

2020

Flipkart

Ladies vs gentlemen is an opinion poll-based show where India's favourite opinion makers go head to head against each other on some of the most debated questions about men vs women. Aired on Flipkart app, this show stars Ritesh Deshmukh and Genelia Dsouza as hosts, with popular panellists like Rashami Desai, Karan Kundra, Karan Wahi, VJ Bani, Nia Sharma and Tejasswi Prakash. The show also gives viewers the chance to play along and win exciting prizes.

INTERVIEW:

Avery Yang

Marketing Director of
Variety Programmes

iQIYI

Avery Yang is responsible for the overall marketing and strategic planning for iQIYI's original variety shows from gameshows to food, talent and comedy shows. Avery also manages the programme integration strategy for the channel's top shows such as FOURTRY.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial or inevitable to financing shows?

In China these shows are made with the support of brands and sponsors; we usually launch a project once we have a brand behind the idea. This is the case for all streamers and linear TV stations in the unscripted space in China.

Youth with You is China's most popular variety show about a group of women striving to become the next idol. Season 2 ended in June in 2020 with the announcement of the nine-member idol group THE9 – the winners of the show. The group went on to become ambassadors for the show's title sponsor Mengniu Zhenguoli (dairy brand). In addition to Mengniu, the toothpaste brand Darlie and skincare brand, Kiehls are also integrated into the programme (up to 10 sponsors per programme). A multitude of brands compete to be the sponsors – it's a great show and they are all fighting to be the main title sponsor.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

Mostly, the in-house producers come up with the idea and then invite the brands for a presentation.

This is technically a sales pitch - the brands ask when the programme is going to air and most importantly which celebrities will be in the show – this is obviously key for them.

That is the model that works for us and it boils down to iQIYI choosing which brand to work with given the fierce competition.

Once we have our title sponsor (Mengniu for **Youth with You** and Vivo the mobile phone manufacturer in the case of the show FOURTRY), we can go into production and our affiliate sales team will seek out partnerships with secondary sponsors.

Sometimes brands do approach us ask for a specific type of show and we come up with some ideas and a proposal for them with our in-house production team. But typically, it's the other way round that is the preferred model for us.

What are the obstacles?

Ultimately the producer is responsible for the show and our brands trust us. We offer a fully integrated branded campaign and sometimes brands might have their own idea for the show and revert back to the traditional way of placing products. On occasion we have to discuss the best way forward and there is a little reluctance sometimes as this is a new approach, but the process is mostly peaceful, they trust us.

As in the case of **Youth with You**, with QR codes on milk cartons and billboards, we are constantly catching peoples' attention and enticing them to take out their phones and scan back to the contestant's page and watch the latest show and vote for their favourite celebrity/contestant.

Are certain markets and demographics more receptive to BFP? Is that changing?

At iQIYI, our audience is young and growing with over 118 million subscribers according to iQIYI's 2020 first quarter financial results.

For **Youth with You**, the choice of talent - Blackpink's Lisa with her 20 million fans* and Kun's super idol status in China with 27 million fans obviously had a big impact on the brand's appetite to collaborate and ultimately the viewership.

How has BFP evolved in the last decade?

We see that brands are seeing the big shift to OTTs and are following the younger audiences. They are willing to support content on streaming platforms and tap into a larger, younger audience.

What impact has this last year had?

2020 has been a challenging year for many but we have managed to keep going on the production front (despite a brief halt) and obviously more and more young people have been working or studying from home due to the pandemic, spending more time online and watching content. This has accentuated the shift and made brands more open to working with us.

Useful lessons from any recent case studies?

By involving the brands in the competitions, iQIYI capitalises on Generation Z and millennials' use of social media platforms and this integration is more effective in the long term for the brand and much more preferable to traditional ad spots.

The **Youth With You** fans can obtain extra votes from milk cards or milk caps by buying a carton of Mengniu milk or Lisa's favourite Mengniu yoghurt in a 7-Eleven store or supermarket. One milk card grants 15 votes and five special votes and one milk cap gives three votes and one special vote. They simply scan the QR code, receive their extra points and vote for their favourite celebrity. The competitions have been a very successful way of engaging with the target audience and an efficient way of selling the brands' products.

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* *Data provided by iQIYI to PR Newswire following announcement of the two celebrities' participation in the series*

EUROPE

INTERVIEW:

Jes Brandhøj

Head of International & Sales

and

Taus Abildgaard

CCO & Founder

Drive Studios, Denmark

Drive Studios HQ is located in Copenhagen with an additional office in Oslo and the entity Drive Beta in Berlin. The office in Copenhagen is a hub for Danish and international productions of various kinds. Drive help both commercial clients and broadcasters to develop, produce and distribute premium content, documentaries and tv series for a global audience.

Tell us a bit about your roles, and about Drive's general model when it comes to brand funded TV programming.

Jes: After 5 years we are reframing our branded content focus in the Copenhagen office. Our office was founded by TV people – we now have around 50 employees - and longer-form storytelling is our strength.

Taus: It feels like we are entering a new era for brands – thanks to everything from Black Lives Matter, to coronavirus, to Brexit, to the environment – where they need more than ever to 'do' real purpose, to take a perspective or make a difference. And they need TV-style producers and storytellers to help them do that. The audience are so wise to these brand messages now – the stories need to feel true, real and journalistically told to be believed.

Jes: In the early days we often ended up being sub-contracted by the ad agencies to do the stuff they couldn't do – not the full 360, the ad spots, the strategy, but the linear, longer stories involving real people, and that is the strength we are now playing to. That's still how many of our clients come to us - through the ad agencies, who realise they lack the expertise to tell these longer stories that can hold the audience's attention.

Taus: So for example we now have Carlsberg coming to us, saying they want to show what they are doing for the climate. They can go two ways – get an agency to do TVCs; or do more journalistic stories about the company, the people in it, and what they are all doing around sustainability. That's where we can help. Most of the brands have moved their CSR teams closer to their marketing strategy now, so that is much of their focus.

Taus: We've also done lots with Carlsberg around the 'science of beer' and also how they contribute to society via their Carlsberg Foundation for research and science. We've made a series for them called Stay Curious Explainers: small explainers on big science questions like black holes.

Where does Denmark sit on the spectrum of branded entertainment, versus other territories, in terms of regulation and audience acceptance of it?

Jes: Denmark is really up there in terms of digital consumption, so lots of the brand funded content is on social media or YouTube.

Taus: For us that's easier than going through a broadcaster.

Jes: But then channels like TV2 have a branded content division, and have been doing dating shows, and one titled Denmark's Most Delicious Pork (from Danish Crown) that they managed to film and put out this summer. For them a branded content proposition has to meet the same criteria as their other content.

Taus: Or in fact it has to be better so that people don't feel they are paying to watch ads.

Jens: Recent research shows that a 30 to 35-year-old man in Denmark only watches six minutes of linear TV in the two-hour primetime window. So it's a very small audience they're trying to catch The streamers could do more branded content, but people don't want to watch ads AND pay.

Do you think BFP is growing into a bigger part of many brands' TV strategy? Which types of brand have more/ less incentive and resource for BFP now?

Taus: I saw a slide from a presentation at Cannes Lions that emphasised the importance of brands making a difference. It said that 86% of people wouldn't use a brand if it didn't have some sort of wider purpose.

Jes: It's very hard for FMCG brands – they can't just be selling more chewing gum or whatever, they need to create a story. And that's what BFP can do for them. But it needs time and commitment from their CMOs – time they often don't have, with short-term financial demands and annual marketing budgets.

And if they don't really do what they are saying they do, consumers will know it. Like with shipping company Maersk's controversial campaign recently – a black girl rapping about diversity - where consumers and press alike reacted negatively to what was conceived as an obviously untruthful diversity story.

Jes: Being truthful can really pay off for a brand. This year we did a classic workplace reality series for Sydbank. They sponsor a major football tournament here and wanted to maximise that investment. We found a small club with a passionate coach and did a mini-workplace series with them – 5x6" on social media, called **The Forgotten Heroes of the Cup**. The coach was such a great character, it got picked up by ViaPlay and put on their channel – a case of getting inadvertent paid media, just through telling a real story that engaged people.

Is there any change in the types or genres of content brands are interested in funding now?

Taus: We are mainly seeing the demand for documentary stories now. We have been doing some content that is more like reality entertainment – for example **Med andre øjne (Eye of the Beholder)**, funded by Zalando, featuring different influencers and published across their own channels, to encourage Danish youth with low self-esteem to be happy as they are.

Jes: Our branded content like this borrows all the tropes of traditional TV – so that one has a Queer Eye-kind of feel – but on digital platforms and so liberated from the constraints of broadcasters, fixed durations etc.

Taus: We also did a show for IKEA, **Home of Happiness**, where a girl from Hong Kong and a guy from Chicago were invited to Denmark to find out why Danes are so happy. That was a six-part series, where they went to meet all sorts of interesting characters – again your classic TV

format devices of fish-out-of-water, seeing yourself through the eyes of others. It was co-produced together with the agencies Vizeum, Hjaltelin Stahl and Verizon, and won various Best Branded Content Awards.

What would be your advice to TV producers trying to navigate this world for the first time?

Jes: From our experience - figure out who you are and what your expertise is. Ad agencies know how to talk process and strategy, but TV production is a different game – play to your strengths in helping them tell a story. And then find the best partners – whether that's social media experts or distributors, to get it out there.

Taus: When you do deal with brands, be prepared for it to be very complex. And for the amount of polish, presentations and people to go up! In TV we have a development person, and then a producer overseeing a project. But brands are used to having an account manager to handle all their queries and issues – make sure you assign one!

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INTERVIEW:

Hannes Jakobsen

CEO

DRIVE beta, Germany

DRIVE beta was founded in 2018 as a Joint Venture between Johannes Middelbeck and Hannes Jakobsen in Berlin, with DRIVE studios as strategic partner and investor. They produce digital moving images for both the public service and the commercial sector, and are experts in ideation, production and distribution. Current clients include funk, ZDF and Warner Music. The Berlin office currently is home to 40 specialists from fields such as journalism, production, documentary as well as digital distribution, animation and graphics.

What has been your BFP model in the German office of Drive?

I started DRIVE beta – in 2018 together with my co-founder Johannes Middelbeck. I came from a digital strategy and management background at Divimove, now part of RTL. At first I thought branded content would be a big part of what we'd do, particularly co-creating with influencers. But our focus has changed to being more about journalistic storytelling and longform digital content.

We did one branded project last year with Warner Music and two German influencers called Lisa and Lena who are huge on TikTok and Insta. We created premium content for their YouTube channel and integrated the Warner Music catalogue into it.

Then this year we kind of stumbled into work for TikTok as a result of trying to keep a great team we had on board. We ended up doing five channels for their Learning with TikTok initiative – informational content around sexual health, science, activism, space (with Germany's first female astronaut) and sustainability.

The sexual health channel @doktorsexy got more than half a million followers in three months, and 2 million+ views for some pieces of content. We own the channels, and they are now transitioning into ad-funded channels, that other brands can buy into.

Our experience is that brands want to speak to young audiences, but they don't want to take the risks that they need to get that kind of content through the process, and to truly engage them. Better to create the case first, start speaking to that audience and build a following, then you can go out and get more funding from brands who also want to reach the target group.

Lots of brands and media companies did burn through a lot of money doing owned and operated channels on, for example, YouTube; but if you do it lightly, cheaply and quickly, as on TikTok, it's much less risky. And if you have journalistic or storytelling credentials that feed into it, it means you don't have to go chasing clients, they come to you.

Now DRIVE beta are also creating a TikTok channel for the Goethe Institute, our cultural institute, to promote German language and culture to young German learners.

Where does Germany sit on the spectrum of branded entertainment, versus other territories, in terms of regulation and audience acceptance of it?

BFP is certainly increasing in Germany and is much more accepted on broadcasters and platforms like YouTube. In general it needs to be openly acknowledged as from a brand, not covert, and then fans will celebrate the creators who work well with brands and who truly create value for the users.

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INTERVIEW:

Lasse Nikkari

Head of Formats & Branded Entertainment

Sanoma Media/ Nelonen, Finland

Lasse Nikkari works as an Head of Formats & Branded Entertainment at Nelonen, Finland, with the aim to build bridges between local brands and international hit formats. Before joining Nelonen, Lasse has worked in development and sales positions for several years with different production companies. He has brought several international hit formats successfully to Finland as well as created and produced branded content shows. Lasse joined Nelonen from Warner Brothers Finland, where he worked as Head of Formats.

Tell me about your new role at Nelonen, and how the channel and its parent group (Sanoma Media) are ramping up in the area of brand funded TV programming.

I came here nine months ago to help implement Nelonen's new strategy to do more and better branded content programming.

My primary goal is to to help our channel to become stronger with brand funded programming. In addition to local own devised formats tailor made for Finnish brands, I look into building a bridge between brands and successful TV formats. It is not easy in a territory as small as Finland to grow new ideas - the TV economy sets restrictions - so I want to offer the brands the best tried and tested vehicle to suit their brand marketing. But obviously there are some big names, who might want their own, uniquely devised idea, featuring their own characters, so I'm not closing any doors.

But primarily this will be about finding formats that we want to make, and are proven to work, but that we need extra funding for. We want to see those big, successful formats in weekly primetime slots but the size of our market dictates our budgets and many of the big international formats are difficult to make profitable in Finland. So partnering with a brand on them will hopefully mean we can deliver them, and give us that competitive edge.

For example we have picked up All3Media's **The Dog House** format and will be producing it for the fall with a strong brand partner. That should be a great fit that can help us get more business like it. Even though we believed in the format, we would have not necessary done a direct commission, but with a well-fitting brand it became a lower risk investment – they enabled it.

What we look for is 'triple win' projects that can bring ratings and grow our channel, help with brand building for the brand client, and can lead to a recommission for the producer, so they eventually make money out of it too.

We are not the biggest channel in Finland, MTV is, but we are the biggest media house and that is our advantage. We can present bands with 360 marketing plans, a multi-channel strategy, because we have everything in house. We can talk about the show in advertorials, on radio, in newspapers, via digital platforms – it can all be connected around one property.

What are you finding to be the most effective ways to get a brand funded project made?

Our strategy is do more and better branded content show in future. I guess part of that is to learn and develop as we go. What we are doing now is taking an option window on a show, **Top Chef** from NBCU just now, and then using that time to find a commercial partner.

Other shows and models have just popped up due to coronavirus. So we already had a successful lifestyle show from Endemol Shine called **Villa and Outhouse** (**Huvila & Huussi**). Every year there is an annual home deco fair in different cities each year, but because of the pandemic the organisers were worried that their brands wouldn't be able to showcase their products properly. We got the hosts of **Villa and Outhouse** to do a magazine-style series at the expo to show it off - **Huvila & Huussi Asuntomessuilla** (Tr. **H&H at the Housing Fair**). We matched well – known lifestyle format with existing expo brand and got results every party was happy with. Now we are already talking what could be done next year.

Where does Finland sit on the spectrum of branded entertainment, versus other territories, in terms of regulation and audience acceptance of it?

Both main commercial channels in Finland are doing branded entertainment, but we are the first to have an Exec Producer responsible for it, so we will do more, like Channel 4. There is a general acceptance that these partnerships are worthwhile based on previous cases.

And the better case studies there are to point to, both in terms of ratings and brand messaging, the more other brands will be encouraged to try it.

Can you tell us about some recent or current BFP shows you've been involved with? Any particularly useful lessons from them?

We did a series of a show called **The Food Inventors** with S - Group supermarket chain where small brands come up with new recipes, and the winners get their product in the stores next day. Along with decent ratings, the winner – a pie maker – had to build more manufacturing space, the demand was so great. So a branded entertainment show turned a local business into a success story pretty much overnight.

The same company own petrol stations and we are producing a second series of a rather funny reality show about the workers there. We are working closely with S Group - they have content as a big part of their marketing strategy. And their rival supermarket group is now also waking up to the opportunities. Which goes to show that Finnish brands indeed acknowledge the opportunities branded content, and brand entertainment encompass.

We also had an energy company Fortum fund a talk show about climate change - **Riku Rantala & 100 kysymystä ilmastosta** (Tr. **Riku Rantala & 100 questions about climate**) - and new technologies to combat it. Their mission was to generate healthy and varied discussions about this very important topic. They gave the well-known host [Riku Rantala] the journalistic freedom to make it, so it was editorially sound, and then lots of good conversations were generated around it, on different platforms, so again that delivered what the brand wanted.

And we're doing another 3x22" series with a private medical provider about how the private health sector have been helping the public health service to fight coronavirus. The client is re – launching the way they tell their brand story with a multi-channel marketing campaign and this documentary is integrated into the campaign seamlessly.

In addition, we just closed brand partnership deals for Beyond Entertainment's **Love It or List It**. We've had the readymades in Finland for years so it is great to be able to finally produce the local version for the Finnish audience. This is a spot-on example of "a bigger than the market format" in budget sense - something that we have made possible in Finland with bold brands, who think ahead.

What are the creative and regulatory obstacles or challenges to BFP?

How the brand is involved is very important and this is naturally the biggest creative challenge. In my opinion, the show should be able to stand alone as an idea, with or without their participation. When a brand is involved in the content, it needs to add value and you then need to carefully think about the brand rub – how well the brand and its message is being built into it. It is fine balance and requires creativeness.

And that can take several rounds of negotiation, especially if a distributor's IP is involved. But if they are willing to be open to it, they will get another territory taking the format.

In regulatory terms, it needs to be clear that the show is brand funded and of course we need to have necessary disclaimers. The production company needs to retain editorial control. And the show needs to look different to the commercials sat within it.

Is there any change in the types or genres of content that can be brand funded now?

I'd like to explore different genres in time. I think procedural comedy could work well for brand marketing with the right partner.

What would be your advice to TV producers trying to navigate this world for the first time?

It's much easier doing it at a channel than as a producer! For a production company it's a big risk – they have to essentially pitch the idea twice: to the brand and the channel. This is a big and risky investment in terms of work hours. This I know from experience.

However, I believe with brand entertainment we can make television more vibrant and lucrative and achieve great things for brands. In order to make this happen, to take brand entertainment to its next phase, we need regular and transparent conversations in the name of the common good, between production companies, brands and broadcasters.

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USA

INTERVIEW:

Christian Murphy

Head of Enthusiast Brands

A+E Networks

Christian Murphy is a veteran content and marketing executive, having worked in nearly all areas of the media and production business both in the U.S. and internationally, for global content creators, as custodian of some of the world's most recognized brands.

He currently oversees production of over 150+ hours of original long form programming annually, including around 70+ hours of live TV across many genres and formats, from lifestyle to documentary, factual entertainment, unscripted reality competition and brand funded content.

What is your role at A+E Networks?

The brand funded space a small part of what I do at A+E. My main role and what I launched some years ago was the Enthusiast Brands group which is responsible for commissioning and overseeing all the content needs for FYI and the Enthusiast Brands blocks on FYI, A&E and History. Our group has just been charged with trying to identify, develop and execute new content monetization models which includes the brand funded space but that is one small part of how we have built the business.

Do you see brand funded programming as crucial to financing future shows?

I believe it is a growing and increasingly important model in the content ecosystem, but it is just one of many that are emerging, all will be necessary to ensure the viability of great storytelling and industries, platforms and businesses that are built on it. I don't believe that brand funded content will be the dominant model, but it does and will play an important role in the future.

I also believe the definition of 'brand funded' programming has changed and will continue to change, it's not well understood right now, it's a very big, broad and expansive bucket that covers many different approaches and I do think there's not a great understanding of what it is and what it can be.

Which do you think are the most effective models of brand funding?

In the work we have done at A+E Networks, we don't have any set templates or models as it pertains to brand funded content, it's not really the approach we take and in my mind, would not set us up for success. Every partnership that we enter – and partnership is really the key here - is essentially bespoke and built from the ground up based on the opportunity at hand.

Depending on the opportunity, we spend considerable time evaluating and developing the creative, build a platform and distribution strategy, develop a robust roll-out - promotion,

social media, press etc - and align our goals with those of our partners. The approaches can vary markedly. We're held accountable for both a viewer outcome (usually ratings, usage) as well as a commercial outcome, delivering some sort of value to the organization which can come in many and varied ways (revenue, share of sales, new clients, increased pricing).

How important is data when working with brands?

Critical on many levels, we use research extensively which includes ratings and not just standard ratings but quality of audience, engagement and a cumulative audience based on the platform strategy. We also use qualitative research through things like MRI data (intent to purchase).

What are the obstacles or challenges? And the impact on editorial/creative development?

Creating content in the 'brand funded' space (even though I don't think this definition is particularly helpful and is not at the core of what we do at A+E and certainly not what I do predominantly in my role) is not significantly different to developing content through more traditional avenues and faces similar challenges around creative development (and the time it can take), talent, storytelling and financing.

In my experience, it's not that different in many ways, just different parties and different people writing the cheques! In the projects we take on, we are heavily involved in creative and always go in with the goal of making the best show possible and we always maintain creative oversight of the show when it is on our air.

Is there a sweet spot in terms of funding for broadcaster and producer to make money?

Difficult to answer this question, brand funded content is a small piece of what we do, just one of the models we have used successfully to build our business. Additionally, as I mentioned, all of the partnerships we build are essentially bespoke, built from the ground up, some are expansive and might include a commitment to a full series in prime time, while others might be a short form series placed within our enthusiast branded blocks. At the end of the day, the most successful programs are built on true partnerships where both parties are committed to working together and doing the work needed to have success.

Are there any categories that are more active in the US in your space across the A+E Channels?

We launched some years ago our 'Enthusiast Brands' strategy which is focused on the home, auto and outdoors spaces. These are ready built brand platforms that provide safe environment for shows in those genres to have success.

What do you think is the motivation for brands to get involved in content creation?

As the media landscape changes, brands are looking to find innovative new ways to engage consumers and one of the best ways to do that is through storytelling. When brands can get storytelling right, along with a subtle brand or product message, they are more likely to engage consumers in a conversation and hopefully trial their product or service.

The most important thing is that our programming or content is "brand friendly". We provide a quality of audience that is highly engaged, upscale and an audience that is responsive and open to all brands in the "home" category.

What we offer is excellent MRI data, different tools and products for brands beyond just the linear program and we create blocks around the enthusiast brands. We can then create short form content for brands with tips and tricks that are engaging and add something extra for the audience.

Are certain markets or demographics more receptive to BFP? Is that changing?

The big challenge for A+E Networks was extending our portfolio of brands that we were working with. We have worked with brands like Proctor and Gamble for years, but what we wanted to do was start to work with other new clients that were only playing on social. I created a magazine show called **All You Need to Know** which was really a sales and marketing tool interviewing CEO's of innovative companies and the sales team then the partnerships happened from there.

How do you navigate different territory regulations with global projects?

For the brand funded or brand initiated projects we do, we're usually just focused on the US market.

Our regular network commissions are generally bought out worldwide.

How has BFP evolved in the last decade?

It's all about the idea of partnership now. It's never been more important especially if you are investing, time, money, and energy.

What impact has this last year had?

In terms of the impacts of the last year, we have had to become even more scrappy an innovative in how we produce content.

What would be your advice to those trying to navigate this area for the first time?

The content landscape has changed so much in recent years and continues to change dramatically, all of this has had a significant impact on producers whose own business models are evolving. Working with brands can be a way to develop new revenue opportunities for producers but it is a specialist skill and producers need to be very entrepreneurial to have success.

We are seeing more and more 'A level' producers who produce some of our biggest network shows, come to us with brand content initiatives and we will partner with them to figure it out.

About K7 Media

K7 Media is a global consultancy providing media intelligence to broadcasters, streamers, distributors and producers around the world.

With an extensive network of researchers and consultants and their comprehensive knowledge of the TV and digital sector, K7 media is considered an invaluable resource to its global clients.

Through personalised research, showreels and unlimited access to the team, clients view K7 Media as their trusted partner for reliable insight and information on the media industry.

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