

Chasing Eyeballs

Alliance Atlantis will go to almost any lengths to market its specialty TV channels directly to consumers

BY CHRIS POWELL

Alliance Atlantis Broadcast Group is taking the marketing for its 12 specialty TV channels to new heights.

Since July, the Toronto-based broadcaster has provided programming culled from its specialty services, which include Food Network Canada, History Television and Home and Garden Television (HGTV), for all Air Canada flights lasting more than 90 minutes.

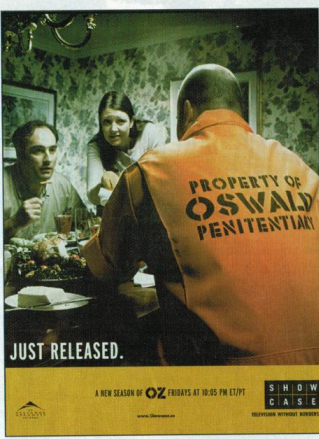
Updated monthly, the 30-minute block consists of either a single show (in September, it was an episode of HGTV's home decorating show *Room Service*) or a magazine-type show featuring highlights from various Alliance channels.

The recent agreement with Air Canada—which is actually the continuation of a partnership that has existed for about five years—is one of several forged by the broadcaster's newly created advertising and partnership marketing group. Formed in July, the group's mandate is to seek out partners that can extend the company's reach.

Vice president of marketing Walter Levitt says these deals provide "world-

class" TV content for Alliance Atlantis's partners while generating brand awareness, subscriptions and tuning to the broadcaster's array of specialty services. "One of our strengths is we have 12 very strong, well-known, very consumer-friendly brands," Levitt explains.

"We believe that the traditional ways of marketing TV still work, and we're still committed to them," says Levitt. "We still advertise our channels, we still use our own airwaves to promote our channels and have extensive PR efforts. But we think there are lots of other unique ways that we



Magazine ads promote Oz on Alliance Atlantis's channel Showcase

can take these channel brands out to consumers.

"For TV, this is fairly new," he adds. "There has been a traditional

model to how TV markets. In the past it was all about individual shows: 'I have this show tonight, I have this show tomorrow night.' But I think specialty TV has really broken a lot of the moulds and found new and innovative ways to market."

With an eye-popping number of channels vying for the attention of Canadian viewers and advertisers—Toronto-based BBM Bureau of Measurement currently measures 260 channels, a figure that encompasses network and local channels, plus analogue and digital specialty services (but not U.S. channels)—and a slew of CRTC-approved diginets yet to debut, broadcast executives like Levitt say brand recognition is increasingly important to standing out in the media-saturated landscape.

But it's not just specialty TV broadcasters who are devising ways to extend their marketing reach.

CBC Television, for instance, has also had what spokesperson Ruth Ellen Soles calls a "longstanding" agreement with Air Canada to provide news and sports coverage on its flights.

"It's a way for us to make our brand available to the people who travel on Air Canada," says Doug Brooks, chief marketing and sales officer for CBC Television in Toronto. "They're the

national air carrier, and they're affiliated with the national broadcaster. It's just a good fit for the two brands to speak to their customers."

CBC is also partnering with General Motors of Canada for *The Great Canadian Music Dream*, a national music talent show whose winner will get a one-hour show on the network late next year. Beginning this month, CBC will begin driving traffic to a dedicated Web site (www.dreamstream.ca), where people can listen to audio clips of contestants and vote on a winner.

"When we're looking at doing a marketing program, we're not just looking at the advertiser, we look at the power of the brands that they would be individually. We're looking for ways we can work with advertisers to drive awareness and association with our brand."

Toronto-based Bell Globemedia, the BCE subsidiary that operates several high-profile TV properties such as CTV, Discovery Channel and TSN, recently inked a three-year deal with Montreal's Digital Advertising Network, which operates advertiser-supported video screens in the food courts of 62 "A-list" malls across the country, to

show branded content from those properties on DAN's screens.

While this content will initially be shown in a 15-minute loop updated four times a day, Kevin Shea, BGM's executive VP of convergence, says that the goal is to provide real-time information to food court patrons.

BGM also went a step further by purchasing airtime on the DAN network, which it plans to resell to its clients—either as a stand-alone entity or as part of a "convergence" bundle that could include other BGM media properties such as the *Globe and Mail* and CTV.

Shea says the deal was driven partly by BGM's desire to promote its brands, but also by marketers' increasing desire to surround their messages with content that attracts would-be consumers.

"In this day and age, what the retailer or supplier or client wants is not just its messages, but news, weather, sports and business information," says Shea. "They have typically come knocking on our door because, from a brand perspective, we're a leader in the areas of news, business information and sports. The DAN screens will carry GTV Newsnet, highlights from RoBTV and TSN. If you sit back, there are very few companies that can supply that level of content."

So while brand recognition is a welcome by-product of such an

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arrangement, Shea says BGM takes a different view of its deal with DAN: an entry into the realm of out-of-home advertising.

"From our perspective, we see the whole notion of out-of-home advertising going digital," he says. "Things that are static today are going to move tomorrow. We are not looking at this strictly as a way to get our brands out, but rather providing a full digital service to clients."

But for broadcast groups like Alliance Atlantis, these innovative marketing initiatives—which have also seen the History Channel supply questions for the in-bar trivia network NTN Canada and HGTV personalities appear at various Canadian home shows—are all about increasing brand awareness.

"There are lots of other ways to create consumer connections to your brands," says Levitt, "and we're really looking for companies that feel the same way—that at the end of the day consumers are brand loyal and you need to build the brand in their mind

to keep them that way."

Levitt says Alliance's year-old digital services, which include Showcase Action, Discovery Health and BBC Kids, are still "very much in driving subscriptions mode," meaning that making consumers aware of these channels is a priority.

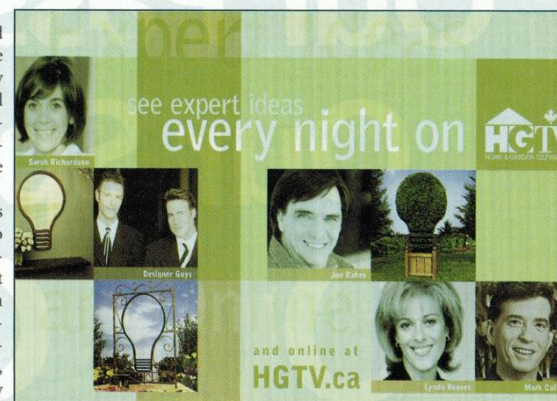
Hence, initiatives such as showing branded content to what Levitt calls "captive" audiences at 30,000 feet and, in yet another recent deal between Toronto's Healthy Canadian Media Group and the digital channel Discovery Health Network, in the waiting rooms of family medical clinics.

"The first step of getting consumers to subscribe to these channels is making sure they know they exist," Levitt says. "A lot of what's been done here has been about building the brands, building awareness of the channels in the consumers' minds."

That's doubly important for the digital channels, says BGM's Shea, pointing out that these services are no longer available to consumers since a free preview period ended earlier this year.

While in-flight entertainment is the engine that drives the Alliance Atlantis deal with Air Canada, the broadcaster has stopped just short of having Food Network Canada personality Emeril Lagasse pilot the plane in making passengers aware of its presence.

For example, passengers are served in-flight snacks in boxes bearing the Food Network Canada logo and a message urging them to "Have lunch with Food Network Canada. Tune in weekdays from noon to 2 p.m." The broadcaster also runs a program guide and more traditional advertising for shows



HGTV brochures (above) promote the channel's personalities at Canadian home shows; an Alliance Atlantis ad (below) in Air Canada's *enRoute* magazine promotes its channels

including Showcase's prison drama *Oz* in the airline's in-flight magazine, *enRoute*.

Alliance also has a longstanding partnership with DMG World Media—a London, England-based company with offices in Toronto that specializes in consumer shows and trade exhibitions—to feature its brands at various shows across the country.

For instance, visitors to a DMG home show in Canada might enter the show through an HGTV entranceway, receive goodies in a bag bearing the HGTV logo and watch HGTV personalities give live demonstrations. A handout distributed at DMG shows this year features HGTV's fall schedule and invites people to visit the channel's Web site. "It's a perfect relationship in that

they obviously target people who we know are positively predisposed to watching HGTV," says Levitt. "DMG loves the fact that they can market these shows on our channels, they love the association with our hosts."

As an example of this mutually beneficial relationship, Levitt cites an appearance by the stars of HGTV decorating show *Designer Guys* at a DMG home show in Van-

couver this past spring. "It was a mob scene," he says. "It was like the Beatles had appeared there: thousands of screaming fans for these personalities from HGTV."

While there's no direct correlation between Alliance's marketing initiatives and tuning to its channels, recent audience data from Nielsen Media Research of Markham, Ont., indicates that HGTV and Food Network experienced year-over-year growth of 38% and 33% respectively among adults 18-49 for the 2001-02 broadcast year. The channels also experienced comparable double-digit growth in other demographics, including adults 25-54 and women 25-54.

"I certainly wouldn't say that the non-traditional marketing initiatives are solely responsible for our success over the past year," says Levitt. "I think I would be more inclined to say that the non-traditional approaches complement the existing, more traditional marketing and promotion of our channels, together with the great programming."

"The non-traditional approaches have certainly increased brand awareness and ensured that the channels and their programming are presented to a broader audience. But I'm not sure we would or could ever say that marketing, or publicity, or programming, or any other department is singularly responsible for our growth."

Still, regardless of whether these marketing innovations are solely responsible for the broadcaster's growth in the specialty arena, Levitt says that Alliance Atlantis will continue to go where the eyeballs are.

"Our need is to find new and innovative ways to take our programming beyond the TV screens and expose it to more people," he says. "You'll be hearing more from us on this front."

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