

10/12

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

200,000
Average daily views for Korean rapper Psy's viral video *Gangnam Style*



2.3 million
Average *Daily Show* viewers per episode in 2011



44 MINUTES
with
WALTER LEVITT

Funny business

As the executive vice-president of marketing for blockbuster American cable service Comedy Central, Walter Levitt gets to pitch to a fan base of young men who are passionate in the way that only that demographic can be. Too bad they have the attention span and fickleness of—well, of young men

What do you think is your main role?

Day in, day out, making sure our business—no matter what platform it's on—continues to grow and thrive. I sort of jokingly say that the biggest fear of somebody who's responsible for a young, male-targeted brand that has the heritage of a TV network, is that, in 15 years, you have a bunch of 40-year-old guys sitting around saying: "Remember there used to be that TV channel called Comedy Central? Yeah, whatever happened to that?"

After leaving CanWest, Walter Levitt landed a gig at Comedy Central—and commutes to NYC from Toronto

APPLE
Part 1

In August, Apple became the world's most valuable company—of all time. Here are other market-cap heavyweights over the past 25 years



On YouTube, 48 hours of content are uploaded every minute. So there's no way the average consumer can sift through that content, find the stuff they know, that they love, and that they want to share

So how do you keep up when their habits change so quickly?

We're making sure we're evolving with them. In the last year, we've looked at our brand positioning internally and asked, are we looking at ourselves in the most appropriate way, moving forward? We needed to evolve our own thinking, and no longer think of ourselves as a TV network that does a bunch of other things as well, but to think of ourselves much more broadly as a comedy brand that delivers comedy content anywhere our fans are looking for laughs.

Why do you think the channel—sorry, the brand known as Comedy Central—has such a strong relationship with its fans?

Research says that comedy is the most important thing to young guys in shaping their identity. It's more important to them than their taste in music, more important than their personal style, more important than their favourite sports team or their religion. I think a huge part of that is because comedy is so shareable. And in a world where millennials spend so much of their time on social media platforms, the ability to be the first to share comedy content really

gives young guys the chance to express themselves in a way, and shape their identity in a way, they've never been able to before.

With all this sharing going on, though, content is floating freely, untethered from its sources. What role do you think "brand" plays in that environment, especially when people are as happy to share a clip from *The Daily Show* as a video of cats being goofy?

If you look at any category—not just media, but any category—any time there's a category that is more cluttered, brands tend to play an even more important role. You know the stats: On YouTube, 48 hours of content are uploaded every minute. So there's no way the average consumer can sift through that content, find the stuff they know, find the stuff they love, and find the stuff they want to share.

Do you capture the data on non-TV viewing?

For so many years, those of us who toiled in the TV biz, all we ever looked at was ratings. Our daily research summaries that we look at now certainly include TV ratings. And it also includes traffic to ComedyCentral.com, traffic to our YouTube page, all of the social activity and mentions of Comedy

Central, and all of our various franchises. It looks at our traffic and our views on Hulu, on Netflix. So it really looks at usage of our brand holistically. It's a small thing, but when you start looking at your data in that way, it inevitably changes people's perspective on what success looks like.

You grew up in Canada and were the chief marketing officer at CanWest Broadcasting. There seems to be a greater willingness to experiment in the U.S.

I don't think that's driven by a resistance to try things in Canada. I think it's driven by the reality of the scale of the U.S. At the end of the day, creating an app is the same for a business that has \$100 million or \$1 billion in revenue. Obviously, there's a greater ability to do it when you have a billion dollars. As a result, there's a bit more experimentation. And frankly, there are just generally more people available to try new things.

What are the big differences between working in the Canadian and American media landscapes?

It's certainly a more competitive marketplace in the United States. Because of the opportunity in the media space in the U.S., really every major media brand is active and is vying for share of voice every single day. Whereas in Canada, there are many media brands that are content to lie back and not be as active. The need to remain top-of-mind in this competitive environment is critically important. /Simon Houpt