

Television and funerals without borders

The marketing team behind Alliance Atlantis' Showcase channel tells Lianne Stewart how research, integration and 'wow' factors play a key role in its 92% brand-awareness rating

When Janet Eastwood and Walter Levitt simultaneously came in to the marketing division at Canada's Alliance Atlantis in 1997, the duo's main task was to rebrand AA's signature channel, Showcase. As one of two arts channels on Canadian cable, Showcase initially differentiated itself as the station that broadcast 'cool' late-night, alternative movies, yet the remaining elements of its schedule weren't easily branded.

"When Showcase launched in the earlier years, it was branded around too many different messages," Eastwood, AA's evp of marketing, communications and creative services says. "When Walter and I started here, we did some research to figure out what its greatest equity was, uncovering two areas: movies and attitude." Armed with research data and a desire to create a new brand recognition, Eastwood and Levitt, AA's svp of marketing, approached Showcase's brand building with a packaged goods approach. The print and on-air promotion to media relations to programming teams were all brought together under one group to establish what Alliance Atlantis calls a Brand Team Structure.

Eastwood says: "We work very much in a hand in glove way with our programming, sales and interactive departments to ensure we're buying the right product, scheduling shows at the right time and correctly identify opportunities about the performance

of the brand."

In addition to creating the Television Without Borders tagline, the team's first push was to build equity with Showcase's already popular movie block. The previous late-night slate was bumped up to 22.00, the earliest slot the channel was allowed by law. Levitt says that by concentrating the promotions on Showcase's already known slate of movies, its viewers would be exposed to promotion for the channel's other programming. This tactic laid the groundwork for Alliance Atlantis' future brand building initiatives.

As Showcase's brand recognition grew in pace with its climbing audience numbers, the network moved its equity from movies to its growing slate of acquisition and original programming. Eastwood says: "With the budgets we're working with, we make a deliberate decision to focus the majority of our resources on a couple of key, signature programmes and a couple of key messages for each of our networks. I think *Six Feet Under* is a great example of where we saw a show with a broad range of appeal. We made a deliberate decision to custom produce a variety of different creative executions that would speak significantly to the target audiences of our various channels."

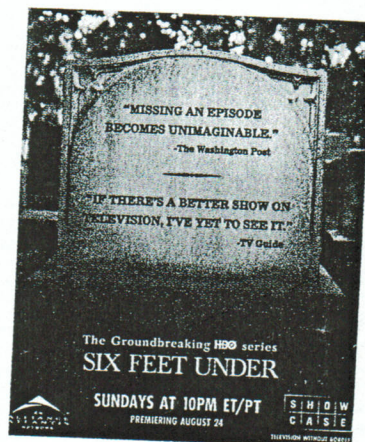
Eastwood says creating custom advertising was a relative no-brainer for Alliance Atlantis by using its slate of sister channels. The promos Showcase could run on AA's drama

channels would be more avant garde than the *Six Feet Under* promos for its lifestyle channels, HGTV (Home and Garden TV) or Life networks.

"When we couldn't be edgy or quirky, we could more promote the fact that this was a critically acclaimed drama that would be one of the top ranked programmes in the US," Eastwood explains.

Six Feet Under, about a family of undertakers, proposed an additional challenge of dealing with a sensitive subject matter. The advertising standards authority criticised Channel 4 when the UK terrestrial spoofed beauty ads in its print and on-air *Six Feet Under* ads. Showcase, however, side stepped any controversy. Levitt says: "We would reinforce things like 'addictive' and 'best show on TV' to reach to consumers and get them to turn it into appointment viewing. We took that notion and wrapped it into the iconography of the show, finding a nice mix between the funeral home backdrop but not going so far as to offend somebody."

Levitt says the *Six Feet* subject matter allowed for Alliance Atlantis to produce what they call a 'wow,' an unconventional promotional vehicle that uses the public space rather than traditional advertising avenues. For example, when Showcase debuted another HBO programme *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, the unassuming public was exposed to literally moving advertisements. People strapped with television monitors would run the promos while waiting for trains at



Toronto's Union Station or going to a hockey game.

"For *Six Feet Under*, the wow was a custom made vehicle that we drove around the streets of Toronto for about a month and a half," Levitt says. "It looked like a giant cube van, but there was an enclosed area with Plexiglas with plasma screens buried in dirt, showing promotions from the show. There was music, it was lit up at night and there were fresh flowers planted on top of the earth."

He says this type of barrier breaking advertising gets future viewers talking, with most people assuming that if a channel would go to so much trouble to promote an already recognisable, yet so far unseen show, then it must be good.

"The challenge is to get our message out there on a fairly limited budget," Eastwood says. "Specialty channels continue to work with smaller budgets, so we have to be very continually smart in using our own resources to maximise impact"

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PROMAX



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Mediaset takes on Tops of the Pops

While public network Rai has opted for an Italian version of CD-UK, rival commercial broadcaster Mediaset has signed a three-year deal for the BBC music countdown show, *Top of the Pops*.

Mediaset, owned by Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, will air the countdown show from September 27 on the country's leading youth channel, Italia 1. The show will be produced by Rome-based Einstein Multimedia and will occupy Italia 1's 16.00 slot.

slated to debut on Rai2 on September 27 but will air two hours earlier than Italia 1's TOTP in the 14.00 slot.

Canal+ to air Cinegroupe toon

French satellite broadcaster Canal+ has given Canadian outfit Cinegroupe's animated children's series *Sagwa* a daily slot in its morning kids animation block.

From September, *Sagwa* began airing in the Canaille+ block, which broadcasts between 7.00 and 9.00 from Monday to Saturday.

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