

Media buyers love

Business



The lingering question is how can PBS best position themselves to compete with broadcast networks and non-premium cable channels. With the rules of corporate underwriting has changed and with the public funding of PBS slashed with the arrival of Republican control of Congress and the White House, public broadcasting finds itself moving toward the acceptance of standard advertising techniques. The demographics of those who watch PBS strongly suggest that there will always be sponsors who wish to exploit that high-end buying power.

All of this does not mean that PBS needs to position itself to act like other TV selling organizations, however. Viewers of PBS are accustomed to a minimum of advertising and a prime selling point is the lack of interruption of those programs except for the semi-annual fundraising drives. To venture PBS toward a situation in which a Masterpiece Theater production of a Dostoyevsky novel is interrupted for commercials for tampons or beer would be to risk losing a primal attraction for the very audience seeking out that kind of prestige programming. Rather than attempting to transform PBS into the kind of tony cable network that A&E or Bravo used to be is to run the risk of turning PBS into the kind of homogenized low-end kind of cable network that A&E or Bravo have become. A much better solution lies in opening up web advertising possibilities such as suggested in the article.

What the article fails to address is an explanation of why public television funding has become such a low priority. PBS was originally intended as the kind of alternative that cable television became. Public television was originally subsidized with public funding and it has become a sad statement that the network that originally eschewed advertising of any kind was forced to look to sponsorship money. If the government of the United States can

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find 15 billion dollars a month to fight an unnecessary war in Iraq, then why can it not find a million dollars a month to subsidize public television that provides programming that is not based upon catering to the whims of corporate sponsorship. Public television should stand like a beacon against the homogenized diet of 100 cable networks that cannot be distinguished because they basically consist of almost duplicate programming choices. A choice even better than slipping into the muck of media buying love would be to keep public television utterly free from the manipulative hands of corporate sponsorship that already controls the programming agenda to such a degree that a network that bills itself as TV Land now shows full-length movies and a network billed as the Cartoon Network now shows live-action programming. PBS is the last best hope for alternative programming that is not controlled by the corporate influence that has sought and successfully managed to take the promise of 500 channels of narrowcasting and transform the result into 100 channels of the broadest and homogenized programming devoid of any identity whatever.