



SELECTION OF GOOD PRACTICES IN VANCOUVER

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GOOD PRACTICE 06

“Channel M: Multivision Television” (Multivan Broadcast Corporation)

INTRODUCTION

On September 13th, 2000 the Canadian Governor in Council requested that the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) report on the earliest possible establishment of an over-the-air television service to reflect and meet the needs of the multicultural, multilingual and multiracial population of the Greater Vancouver Area. In response to the Order, the Commission issued Public Notice CRTC on October 20th, 2000, inviting written comments on the matter from the public. The Commission received over 500 written submissions, virtually all expressing strong support for the establishment of an over-the-air ethnic television service in Vancouver.

On February 28th 2001, the Commission issued its findings on the need for an ethnic television service in Vancouver. It noted that, although ethnic television programming is available in the market, very little is locally produced or locally oriented. A good portion of what is available is foreign, and is distributed by cable or satellite, thus obtainable only through the payment of a fee in addition to the cost of monthly basic service. The Commission concluded that the licensing of an over-the-air television service that would reflect the needs of the multicultural, multilingual and multiracial community of Greater Vancouver was a priority. It also determined that the market could support such a new service. The Commission issued a call for applications under its *Ethnic Broadcasting Policy*, for an over-the-air ethnic television station to serve the Greater Vancouver Area.

The *Broadcasting Act* (the Act), sets out a number of objectives for the regulation of broadcasting in Canada, including the stipulation that the Canadian broadcasting system should portray the circumstances and aspirations of all Canadians and reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society.

The principal components of the Commission's policy on ethnic broadcasting were set out in 1985 entitled *A Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*. The Commission reviewed the policy in 1999 and published its revised *Ethnic Broadcasting Policy* (the ethnic policy). Among other things, the policy provides a framework for the licensing of an array of radio and television services in languages relevant to numerous ethno-cultural communities.

Although the project described here is a for-profit public sector undertaking, it is noteworthy that this originated in response to opportunities opened up by government policy. In this respect, this project may be seen as an example of the potential for public-private interaction in the promotion of multi-culturalism and immigrant integration in the Vancouver region, and emphasizes the possible role that the locally-rooted private sector may be able to play in this regard.

1. PROJECT PROFILE

1.1 Project Promoter(s)

The five principal shareholders of Multivan, a British Columbia corporation, are Robert H. Lee (22.5%), James Ho (22.5%), Geoffrey Y. W. Lau (22.5%), Joseph Segal (22.5%) and Douglas Holtby (10%). The shareholders include local investors of ethnic origin with extensive local business experience. One shareholder has extensive experience in mainstream television broadcasting, including in Vancouver; another has experience in local ethnic radio broadcasting, including ownership in CHMB Vancouver.

The ownership group appointed Art Reitmayer as President and CEO, and a core group of broadcasters joined him to lay the foundation for Vancouver's first multilingual conventional television station.

1.2 Project Name

"Channel M" Multivision Television

1.3 City(ies) where it has been implemented

Channel M is based in the heart of Vancouver's Chinatown. Their station broadcasts its signal on cable 8 in Vancouver and cable 10 in Victoria, and is also distributed to Bell ExpressVu subscribers on CH 254.

1.4 Level

Regional

1.5 Period of implementation

In February 2002, Multivan Broadcast Corporation was awarded an over-the-air broadcast license for a new multicultural television station for the Vancouver market.

Channel M, a locally-owned and operated multicultural station began broadcasting on June 27th, 2003.

1.6 Budget

As a privately owned company, Multivan Broadcast Corporation keeps its numbers confidential.

Initial and permanent funding source

The promoters of this channel demonstrated since they presented the project that they clearly have the financial capacity to fulfill its respective business plan.

Other funding sources achieved

Multivan attracts advertising dollars from a variety of ethnic-language advertisers, including those new to television and those who cannot afford mainstream market rates. By the fourth year of operation, Multivan expected that Chinese and South Asian advertisers would account for \$2 million and \$1.8 million, respectively, in advertising revenues.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE

2.1 Field(s) of intervention

Multivan's station, "MVBC" is an over-the-air television service, offering ethnic television service to Vancouver, including programming that is both informative and entertaining.

2.2 Main objectives of the project

- The station contributes to the community through the broadcast of diverse programming for and by Vancouver's ethno-linguistic communities, and enjoys the support and participation of an advisory board made up of local residents.
- Multivan as a locally owned and managed ethnic broadcaster contributes to a diversity of voices in over-the-air ethnic television broadcasting in Canada.
- Because of the local and ethnic ownership of this over-the-air television station it enhances the attainment of the objectives of the Canadian Ethnic Broadcasting Policy and provides an important step toward recognizing the increasing cultural diversity of Canada's population.

2.3 Target group(s)

Representing over 22 languages and cultural groups, channel M is truly the first station to reflect the city of Vancouver back to itself on television. Channel M offers quality programming and locally produced news in Cantonese, Mandarin and Punjabi as well as 19 other different language groups.

2.4 Number of beneficiaries

Three million residents in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island have access to Channel M.

2.5 Summary of the Practice

Strategy

MVBC reflects ethnic communities by directing a minimum of 60% of all of its programming to at least 22 distinct ethno-linguistic groups. Some ethnic programs are in the English language, and at least 50% of all programs are broadcast in one of 22 other languages. Multivan devotes at least 60% of its broadcast time each month, and, 100% of each evening between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m., to the broadcast of ethnic programs.

Activities

- at least 60% ethnic programming during each month,
- entirely ethnic programs between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. daily,
- a level of at least 60% Canadian programming overall, and 50% during the evening hours (6:00 p.m. to 12 midnight),
- at least 55.5 hours per week of local programming,
- programming directed to at least 22 ethnic groups, using a minimum of 22 distinct languages,
- 28 hours of original news programming each week, half of which will be locally-oriented,
- a two-hour business report in the Cantonese language each week,
- programs featuring lifestyles, current affairs, entertainment, children's programs, drama, health, cooking, comedy and music,
- a minimum of 10 hours each week of programs acquired from independent producers in British Columbia,
- foreign ethnic movies, drama, comedy and sports programming, and

- English-language programming that will reflect multicultural diversity, in line with the Commission's position on such programming as set out in the television policy.

Results

- Main programs and News in Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi and Hindi,
- Extensive local news coverage,
- The hiring of local producers from the communities they target, with currently twelve independent producers,
- Cross-cultural programming,
- Magazine programs with community access,
- Coverage of local events in many different languages,
- Fields of intervention include: news, business, interracial issues, entertainment, world music, cooking series, and exercise series
- Broadcasting of cultural events (Chinese New Year, Indian community Parades)
- Their audience today is 68% Chinese and 88% between Chinese and other Asian communities

3. STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES

3.1 Sustainability

As a for-profit business, Channel M is a self-sufficient project. Multivan Broadcast Corporation does not receive government funding and they support themselves with advertisement. The amount of companies and groups interested in advertising on Channel M is increasing due to the increasing presence and influence that the immigrant communities have in Vancouver.

3.2 Actual and potential advantages

Multivan has synergies specific to its corporate structure. One of Multivan's principal shareholders also has extensive ownership ties to Mainstream Broadcasting Corporation ("Mainstream"), the licensee of Vancouver ethnic radio station CHMB. According to Multivan, this relationship provides efficiencies in the sale of local advertising and the sharing of local news-gathering resources.

The Multivan board is made up of representatives from a variety of ethnic groups, with varied experience in community affairs, ethnic broadcasting, other media, culture and business.

Vancouver residents, a number of them also members of Vancouver's ethnic communities, own Multivan. This structure of ownership of an ethnic television station supports:

- The visible presence of owners in their own communities as well as the community at large,
- The substantial involvement of the owners in the community and the accountability to the community that flows from it,
 - Pride in local ownership
 - Local decision-making,
 - A clear understanding of the local ethnic market, and
 - Responsiveness to the unique communities to be served.

4. POTENTIAL REPLICABILITY IN CITIES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

4.1 Conditions and prerequisites

- Good business model (including the large and strong presence of immigrant communities) within the city,
- Better levels of service by target the biggest communities,
- Government support for the programming of information related to multiculturalism, immigrant integration and network building.

A locally-owned television station has a better understanding of the needs of the local market, and is able to promote local production. Since the specific make-up of ethnic communities in differs from city to city, ownership within the community ensures a more complete understanding of local diversity and community needs.

- Local ownership is a key to success for a multicultural channel.
- It is important to represent local cultural diversity on television; creation of an industry/community task force is important to ensure that any multicultural broadcasting system reflects all the citizens in a specific society.
- There is a need to emphasize the importance of having the participation of all sectors of the broadcasting industry, including specialty services.
- There is a need to contribute to a broadcasting system that accurately reflects the presence of cultural and racial minorities, including Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples.
- And there is a need to ensure that the on-screen portrayal of all such groups is accurate, fair and free of stereotypes in all programming, both ethnic and non-ethnic; and to ensure that hiring practices reflect the diversity of the population.

Electronic media is a powerful tool for shaping identity, enabling the participation of all the population in society, which enhances the ability of ethnic groups to have an effective influence over how images and ideas about ethnic communities are presented and how those groups are portrayed to society in general.

5. LINKS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Interview with Johnny E. Michel Vice-President, Programming, Production & Promotion.
channel m Multivision Television

Multivan Broadcast Corporation: Channel M web page: <http://www.channelm.ca/>