

The most successful programmes everywhere are reality shows

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If you're looking for a winning television programme format, look everywhere, advises Virginia Mouseler, chief executive of The WIT (World Information Tracking), a leading agency that specializes in research and information on TV programmes worldwide.



Mouseler, who was in Mumbai to speak at the launch of MTV's new youth report, talks about the emerging trends globally. Edited excerpts.

Where would you look if you were searching for new formats?

You can find good ideas anywhere in the world, in the most unexpected or small markets. The best example is the Netherlands. It was a small country that produced *Big Brother* in the beginning. So we're looking for ideas everywhere and have correspondents in places such as Chile, Israel, New Zealand as well Finland. Few understand the language except the Finnish, but they have absolutely brilliant concepts (in television programming). Production values are not as good as in India because it's a small country with small budgets. It's a Nordic country so their lights are very strong. But if you turned it to your aesthetics it would be the next big hit.

The UK has high production values and high creativity. It has short series—less than 6-8 weeks, which means it has to keep coming up with something new. If you want to follow trends, you watch that market.

Personally, I would still go to Finland. They are creative and very dynamic. Their ideas are sometimes too new for the world. I would also look to Israel because they have influences from countries such as Brazil and Russia.

What are the factors that influence television content around the world?

Content is first influenced by the need for proximity. People like or need to see on TV what would happen to them, they need some identification. Twenty years ago, around the world, a number of musical variety shows had big star singing in front of a big audience. But young people don't want to see the big star who is so far away from them in status and lifestyle. They want to see people like them.

Over the last 10 years, broadcasters have transformed these variety shows to talent contests. Now, audiences feel they can sing and go up (on a channel) and show them!

In certain cases, world events such as the financial crisis, the Japan earthquake or the impending threat from the damaged nuclear plant can influence content.

There is factual entertainment. For instance, there was an interesting adventure reality show in Chile where a group of people, ordinary people and celebrities had to survive a terrible earthquake and rebuild everything from scratch. Last year, they had a devastating earthquake. So it's about proximity.

What are the top creative trends that you see?

We saw the influence of the economic crisis on television. Instead of educational, weight loss or spiritual coaching, you had a new kind of coaching on personal finance which was helpful and interesting. This year we see something interesting. The financial crisis was so hard on some that what people want is money. They don't want to be millionaires, wait, of course they do! But they don't want to be imaginary millionaires. They want to have the bank note in their hands. This spring there are projects where you see real cash on TV. There are famous formats in the US and Europe called the *Money Drop*. You have two people, a couple or friends with huge amounts of real cash piled up in stacks on a table. Every time they give a wrong answer, the money slips away. The most important visual impact of that show is the money. Another show, called *Still Standing* has a similar concept while in *You Deserve It* (which will be aired) in the US and Germany, contestants play for someone else who needs the money.

Are reality shows still on top?

Everywhere, the most successful programmes are reality shows. In particular, the talent contests. The keywords are competition, singing and dance.

The new successful genre in Germany for day-time TV, is real stories—crime or family. But they look real, played by amateur actors that cost nothing. They have replaced talk shows.

Also, there is a big trend at the moment that started in the US. They take a few well-off, extravagant housewives and the camera pretends to follow their real life. These women, in front of the camera, become almost like actresses discussing what they will wear to their endless parties. And so, it's half scripted and half real. It's a reality adaptation of *Desperate Housewives* except they're real housewives who are richer and have outrageous lifestyles. Of course, in the US, those are not hard to find. Imagine the real housewives of Mumbai, with their beautiful clothes! It would be perfect! (laughs).

Over the past two months in the UK, you have a show called *Famous, Rich and Homeless*. Where you have celebrities who live like a homeless person for a few days.