

Former CBS exec wants media to reinvent

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FORMER senior executive at CBS, FOX and Universal Studios Neal Lemlein has said that the media marketplace is in a state of genuine upheaval, as the digital evolution demands media professionals to dramatically alter the way that programming content is delivered to consumers.

Lemlein was the keynote presenter at the recently concluded Broadcasting Commission's Conference "The Future of Media and Regulation", which examined innovations and trends in a rapidly transforming media landscape.

In his opening remarks, Lemlein noted that despite the digital age, analytics reveal "traditional television is alive and well and remains the connective tissue of all successful media campaigns". This he attributes to the medium's ability to reach "a mass audience, with segmentation ability and the capability for a rapid and expansive message reach platform".

Despite this, he noted, "television media audiences are migrating to additional sources of exposure as a supplemental source of entertainment content, solidifying the relationship between broadcasters and viewers" and setting the stage for the 'new converged culture'. Audience analytics show that the mobile industry is at the centre of the digital evolution as for many, it is their "first screen" experience.

He notes that the most significant shift in media consumption from traditional to digital media will come from print and radio consumers and added that broadcast radio is quickly "becoming very well defined and strategically converged" along the digital

transition highway. This, he says, is fragmenting the listenership among the radio audience. He estimates that digital listenership is projected to grow at a rate of 20 per cent in 2014 and 35 per cent by 2017.

Of the three traditional media, print seems to be bearing the burden of the digital evolution. Digital users are bypassing traditional newspapers and seeking information online. In an effort to stabilise it, newspapers are now using digital tactics to maintain its viability and be part of the new converged culture.

In anticipating the future, Lemlein predicts that futurecasting will be a combination of BROADCASTING and NARROWCASTING. The increase in an individual's ability to have unique entertainment experiences on a variety of platforms such as mobile phones, tablets and PCs, will cause a shift from programming for households to customising programming and packaging to meet individual tastes and preferences.

The increased fragmentation of the market and the development of new programming content to meet individual tastes raises a larger question on the importance and relevance of the existing regulatory framework that governs the media environment where there are limited barriers to exposure, in particular children.

He argues that "giving children empowerment through Media Literacy and, in fact, in an entirely rethought regulatory system and process might be the keys going forward, especially because reliance on content controls and regulations are difficult to define, design and enforce".

Lemlein also raised the issue of national or territorial borders and limitations on content delivery in respect to Jamaica. He notes, "it seems unfair for Jamaican consumers not to have legitimate access to US Satellite programming especially since access to the signal is actually already available 24/7". He stated, "reasonable reconciliation needs to take place - if rights holders only authorise continental US and territorial broadcast, yet allow transmission to filter into Jamaica, then by all means revisit, revise and allow rights acquisition."

Exploring the topic of "Emerging Broadcast Distribution, Transmission and Access Technologies", presenter Patrick Lafayette - broadcaster and owner of Twin Audio Network production company asked media influencers and content creators to consider the level of influence that disabled persons have on the economy of households in Jamaica.

Lafayette, blind from age 16, stated that disabled persons "oftentimes have quite an influence on the daily decisions made within the family and this may even extend to household purchases".

In the case of Jamaica, he pointed to the World Health Organisation census that estimates that 10 per cent of the population, almost 300,000 people, live with a disability and span all groups and segments of the market. Lafayette argued that the disabled community has a critical need to access news, information and other services and the digital revolution provided the opportunity to level the playing field through tools and software that allow disabled persons to enjoy media and entertainment.

He called for the local media fraternity to embrace the needs of the disabled community in Jamaica and learn from their US counterparts, by ensuring that they invest in modern access technologies that will allow programming content to be equipped with software solutions such as SAP (second audio programme) and CC (closed-captioning). This, he says, will empower the visually and hearing impaired and provide them with the ability to engage with content in a wholesome way.

He referenced the US FCC regulations as a model where nine US broadcast and cable networks are legally obligated to provide a minimum of 50 hours of descriptive television every quarter. Lafayette added that the "digital television switchover in Jamaica will be key to the wide deployment of these access technologies to level the playing field for disabled persons."

During the course of the panel discussion and in response to a question from the audience, Executive Director of the BCJ Cordel Green reiterated the importance of programming content catering to the disabled community. Green stated that "the Commission expressly wrote into its 2004 digital switchover paper the requirement of the media to make provisions for persons with disabilities".

"It will find its location in the Commission's policy thinking at an accelerated rate given the pending digital switchover," he added.

The conference closed with a statement from Chairman of the Broadcasting Commission, Professor Hopeton Dunn who remarked that one of the key issues is "the need to underline the continuing importance of the digital switchover" and the requirement for "public policy to designate a time for this switchover ... in line with recommendations made by the Committee," he said.