



## Making a difference in a Multi-Platform World

### Must Small States Miss out?

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I can only imagine that being responsible for strategic planning in a broadcast organization in a large so-called “first world country” in this time in which we live must be quite interesting.

I know for a fact that carrying that responsibility in a small developing nation of under one hundred thousand people is a nightmare!

With new technologies emerging in every aspect of broadcasting it can become quite confusing and expensive for companies, especially if there are tight budgets and cash constraints brought about by operating in a small market.

Added to this, with the many delivery platforms now available, broadcasters have suddenly found themselves with the ability to reach audiences beyond the traditional ones which are constrained by transmitter power and signal strength.

On the other hand, for exactly the same reason, broadcasters no longer have a monopoly on audience within their own territory – so our world is getting smaller while it is expanding at the same time.

The use of the Internet, for example, to move content around and to stream audio/video (Webcast) in addition to audio/video on demand (Podcast), added to the relatively low cost of these services have made us all potential international broadcasters as well as challenge our lien on local audiences.

How does this affect us in these small territories? What must we do differently so that we are not left behind? How can we capitalize on this development so as to become stronger, more profitable organizations?

These are all relevant questions that are facing the broadcaster in the small island state.

*The Reality of living in these times.*

We are currently being bombarded by international broadcasts available on traditional cable or direct-to-home satellite services with *the* addition of note being Webcasting - Internet radio and TV.

Live cell-phone video streaming has also been recently introduced with two of the major North American TV networks getting involved.

Internet radio is already an established source of accessing news, information and entertainment and I submit that Internet TV may not be that far behind in popularity.

A search on Google search engine revealed a company called “World Wide Internet TV” on mediahopper.com which offers 1,174 free TV stations emanating from over 125 countries listed in alphabetical order from Albania to Zimbabwe!

Programme formats range from Gospel to Politics. There is even a Reggae station out of Jamaica. Interestingly enough I couldn’t find a single pornographic channel in there – not that I was really looking.

The point though is that Internet TV already caters for everyone, anywhere. There are even channels Web casting out of China.

It may be correct to say that Internet TV does not as yet attract traditional television audiences – at least not in my region. But with growing Internet use especially by “generation next” one must consider this as a future threat to traditional TV broadcasting.

Added to this is the reportedly low cost of Webcasting.

So it is already affecting us and has the potential to do so even more in the coming months/years with Webcasting costs decreasing, Internet access increasing and home broadband acquisition becoming cheaper and more accessible.

So what’s the plan? What do we do? I suggest we examine how we treat with Technology and Content.

### *Technological Adjustments*

Just as we have invested in new technologies in production equipment over the years which have seen the move from analog to digital, from tape-based operations to non-linear, so too we must now improve our broadcast technology to effectively compete with new international developments.

### *Local Audiences... Are we meeting their needs?*

One thing we must remember as small broadcasters however, is not to take our core audience for granted. Whatever we do to effectively compete with and in the outside world we must firstly ensure that we continue to provide the traditional services to our local audiences, as their means of accessing us and their taste in content are unlikely to change in the short term. So put a hold on getting rid of that Larcan or SBS transmitter for now!

We need to ensure that our internal broadcasting systems are meeting our local audiences’ needs. We should not be afraid of adding to or upgrading traditional radio or TV transmitters as that technology is going to be around for sometime.

Of course before we do this we must consider whether we should go Digital Radio or in the case of TV, High Definition. The answer should lie in your location, your audience and your pocket – but that's another discussion entirely!

### *We too can be Webcasters!*

Once we are comfortably servicing our local audiences with strong quality signals we should then look at our international audiences. Grenada is the perfect example of a country which has a readymade overseas audience. It has always been suggested that there are more Grenadians living outside Grenada than inside. It has in fact been estimated that over 150,000 Grenadians live overseas, a situation that was brought about by the country's history of emigration – the quest for a better standard of life abroad.

What we at GBN have discovered is that our radio Webcast has one of the largest audiences of regional radio stations that are on the internet. In fact Playstream, which is a company based in North America through which we stream audio has stated that GBN Klassic Radio is achieving the same daily audience levels at specific times as some of the larger radio stations in America.

We can only speculate that the audience is largely made up of Grenadian nationals living abroad. We do have some indication that this assumption is correct based on feedback from our website and live telephone calls.

We are also considering TV Webcasting. However, this calls for more bandwidth than we currently have on site – although the cost of acquiring extra bandwidth in the Caribbean is falling, especially with more telecommunication companies being granted licenses.

Although our radio Webcast service is currently provided free of charge we are considering charging a small fee. Our research indicates that this could bring in incremental revenue without necessarily alienating our audience.

Indeed the thirst for news and information *and* just listening to the “back home sound” is big for any immigrant, not just Grenadian – so you too can find your niche audience out there!

### *The Ownership and Creation of Content*

So you have done your technical work - your broadcast signal is reaching the local audience and you are Webcasting both radio and TV. What about content?

Are you just another radio/TV station out there?

What would make you stand out among the thousands of other stations on the internet?

The answer is Content!

### *Find your niche... may I suggest - Local?*

Just as you would within your state, so too you would need to effectively compete on the Internet, except that there are more players involved – many more! One way of achieving this is the effective use of content.

Our experience in Grenada and indeed in the wider Caribbean is that the creation and use of

local/regional programming content is the only effective way to compete on the international stage. In fact even at home, the appetite for local/regional content is growing as more and more TV and radio stations within the Caribbean are scheduling a higher percentage of home-grown material. This format is now effectively competing with the North American Cable TV Channels. So much so, that the number one soap in the second largest television market in the English-speaking Caribbean for the last five years has been a locally produced series. Prior to this, North American soaps such as *The Young and the Restless* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* ruled the roost within the Caribbean.

There is also now a totally local TV station in Trinidad – an entity which would not have been able to exist in the largely foreign programming taste of Trinidad audiences in years gone by.

### *The challenges of financing local content.*

This is an issue that has been around for some years now.

“How do we schedule local when it is much cheaper to purchase the foreign stuff than produce our own?”

If you want to be competitive in this world you have to be different. If you were to duplicate what others do you would just be another “foreign” station out there fighting for the same audience. By tapping in on the tremendous talents of your people and creating programming by you and of you, you have an audience in waiting – your people.

In the case of Grenada which is not dissimilar from many other small developing states, there is an audience of immigrants out there.

Scheduling local on radio is easy. However good quality television production is quite expensive. We therefore need to find affordable ways of producing television content that is of good quality in order to reach our people abroad.

One way of achieving this is to seek available production grants from organizations such as UNICEF and others who have funds for specific types of programming.

Another way would be to lobby Government into providing some sort of assistance be it a grant or a soft-loan. We would of course educate our politicians as to the social benefits of this noble goal.

Whatever form of assistance is required and whatever else we need to achieve this objective it must be done as it has been proven to be the only effective way of competing overseas.

### *In closing...*

So with all that is happening in the broadcasting industry Re: new technologies, multi-delivery platforms – Internet and Satellite, there is no need for us as small developing nations to be left out. We may simply need to alter our thinking and the way we proceed.

Here are some guidelines that we may wish to consider to help us along our path:

1. **Locate and make use of technology that is affordable.** Beware of the “cutting edge” lure. That’s for large organizations that can afford to cut their losses and bail out at any time. Those of us who followed NBC with the Panasonic M11 format in the early 90’s know exactly what I am talking about!

2. **Accept your size and your place in the industry.** There are organizations and mechanisms in place to assist companies in small developing nations. If you pretend that you are a big fish then you would have to hunt for yourself.
3. **Create and schedule local content.** Who can do it better than you? Yes it's expensive but it would pay off in the end in audience and incremental revenue once you develop a sizable, quality archive – and of course there are the social implications.
4. **Look for strategic partnerships locally and internationally.** In this competitive world strategic partnerships with other industry players could mean the difference between survival and death.

In closing one should always keep abreast of developments in the industry so as to not get caught with yesterday's attitudes in tomorrow's world. That's a whole two days apart... and two days in this business is a lifetime!

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January 2006