

# A FEW ESSENTIAL STEPS IN DEVELOPING NEW CHANNELS

by

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I like to begin work on developing new channels by creating a “personality” for the channel. By this I mean, “if the channel were a person ... what would s/he be like?” What are the personality attributes: Serious? Humorous? Irreverent? Sophisticated? Authoritative? Friendly? How would this person/channel dress? What kind of car would s/he drive? What would his/her social circle be like?

Not only is this exercise fun, but more importantly it really helps to drill down and understand what the channel’s creators actually have in mind.

Then, taking it a step further, I like to look at the marketplace and identify all the possible competition. What are the personalities of those channels?

It’s relatively rare for a channel idea to be so unique that there is nothing else in the marketplace resembling it. More often than not, the driving question is how to position the channel so that it is unique and stands out vis-à-vis the competition. With the previous brainstorming, we have a good start on effectively positioning and branding the channel.

Of course, we’ll want to understand the target audience and conduct research to verify that the channel has appeal.

All of this information will drive programming decisions. Or, put another way, the programming strategy is designed to reinforce the channel brand. A good understanding of the channel personality facilitates decision-making when it comes to programming questions relating to they types of shows, playoff patterns, acquisitions, etc.

Generally speaking, we’ll want to establish one or two shows that define the channel and enable it to stand out, achieving a sense of uniqueness in the marketplace.

It’s important to establish a realistic launch and rollout strategy. As discussed above, it’s extremely difficult to get launched as a traditional 24/7 linear channel on cable and DBS. Are there realistic distribution alternatives that would work for the channel?

Although traditional models may no longer be feasible, today’s chaotic media environment is filled with opportunities to successfully do things in new, unexpected and exciting ways. I like to spend considerable time brainstorming on what can be done that is new and unique and has a good chance of being economically rewarding. Distribution, exhibition, advertising and program content are all subject to new paradigms. More than ever, we have to “think outside of the box” when it comes to developing new media assets.

Throughout the process, I have been developing and revising financial projections. After a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, it’s time to write a compelling business plan and appropriate presentations/collateral materials that will sell the proposed channel to potential investors, key management, sponsors and advertisers, cable and DBS operators, and other distributors and interested parties.