

In this industry we all say we're different. Your station is unlike any other, right? But is it really? Time for an image check-up.

The first place to start may be to look outside yourself—at your competition. Be honest now. How different is it? Sure they may have different shows, but how different are you really in terms of look, feel and sound? How does your image compare to theirs? If you were two people and I was a stranger (a potential viewer or listener), how would I tell you apart?

Those are the types of questions the CW Television Network had the courage to ask when it launched as the fifth major U.S. network this past fall—the result of the merger between the WB and UPN.

"The first thing we did is look at the marketplace," says Chris Donovan, vice-president and senior creative executive for the CW Television Network. "When you re-brand or launch a new brand, you want to know what your competitors are doing on a fundamental and basic level. What do they look and sound like? A really great place to start (to stand out) is to do the opposite of what everybody else is doing."

It seems so basic. But if you close your eyes and flip around the dial, could you tell which station you were watching or listening to just by the way they sound? If you put your station to the "blindfold" test, could you tell the difference between your sound and theirs?

"A typical network VO is really big," says Donovan. "If you do something different you already feel different. That's what we did. You need to look at where you can go in different directions, of where you can be clever and still play into your creative brief or marketing marching orders. But if you start by identifying valid points of differences for yourself in the marketplace, then you will start to immediately get ahead of the game."

Too often in television, people overlook the importance of sound. But in today's multi-platform universe it's not uncommon to see a 17-year-old watching TV while surfing the net and answering text messages on a cell phone all at the

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BY JOHN McGRATH



same time. What triggers them to turn their attention from one device to another quite often is an audio cue. If they get that cue from your station, will they know it's you talking or do you sound like everybody else?

Of course your sound is only part of who you are. That brings us to test number two. Remove the blindfold and put in some ear plugs and go channel surfing ("the following test is not appropriate for radio", your image voice says here). Short of looking at your logo burned in to the corner of the screen, how different do you really look from your competition?

The CW definitely went in a different direction here when you compare it to other major networks, with bright green as their primary colour.

"We wanted to establish that we were fresh," explains Donovan, reflecting back on developing the network's look and feel. "It was a really splashy, colourful way to (brand the network). It broke through. Love it or hate it, people were like—what is that? It's different. It stands out. It's not like everyone else. Certainly not like other networks."

In terms of creating a feel or personality, the station very much plays to its key demographic of 18-34.

"(For launch) we used our *Get Ready* (song), which had will.i.am and Fergie (from the *Black Eyed Peas*) on it. It was all gift-wrapped with our show stars right up front. From a creative aspect, with the green, with the Free To Be (slogan), we wanted to give people the feeling that the content and the stars of our shows were super accessible."

So once you look at your image, if you find that you could still be a bit more unique than you perhaps are, "don't be afraid to make decisions that put you in the opposite direction of where everyone else is swimming," advises Donovan.

*John McGrath, a Toronto-based writer and voice-over actor, specializing in promos, imaging, commercials and animation, is the voice of Central PA's CW station. He may be reached by phone at 416-876-3945 or by email at info@johnsvoice.com.*



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