Cultural Daily

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VARIETY TV SUMMIT GIVES US A REASON TO TUNE IN!

Catherine · Wednesday, August 13th, 2014

As we get ready to move into the chaos of awards season, the best award for early morning conference presentation (ever) has to go to Marc Juris, President and General Manager of WETV. Juris gave his Keynote Presentation at 9am to an audience of television executives, agents and producers who stumbled into the room at Variety TV Summit, but were instantly awakened both physically and intellectually. Describing how WETV is repositioning their brand in a relevant way to prepare for the future, Juris drew the analogy between creativity and Walmart: “It’s a volume business.” Pointing out the fact that every successful television series didn’t really catch on until season two or three, he explained that “it takes time to tell a timeless story,” because “the first season of your series is the marketing for subsequent seasons.” Juris suggests we embrace technology while remembering that “great stories will always come from the heart – *not* Silicon Valley.”

Making the leap from branding and creativity, Doron Wesly, Head of Market Strategy at Tremor Video took a different slant on the attention that ought to be paid to technology. Describing the impact that cord cutting has had in just the past two years, “Pay TV is down to 86%, cord cutting is up to 11% – and 34% are seriously considering doing it.” Ironically, overall screen time is growing because Wesly points out that “83 million Americans are already streaming content online through whatever screen is nearest to them.”

The next speaker who took the stage was Conan O’Brien. Although professing that “I haven’t really tried since 1985,” Conan took the room on a wild ride that demonstrated the adlib prowess that made him a king of the late night talk shows. “In the 1990’s, the overnights were my whole life,” he explains, pointing out that he was always at the top of the charts. “After The Tonight Show, there was a media surge that was all Internet-driven, because I was not allowed – legally – to communicate on TV.” Ironically, the network and their legal teams said it was okay for him to communicate online. In a stroke of genius, he sent ONE TWEET that announced a national tour of live performances – and it sold out immediately. “People didn’t know what the show was – and neither did I! We put a show together in a few weeks and hit the road.” The entire tour was promoted through social media. “I’d say where I would be and people would show up.” It gave him a fresh start. He got to create a very different experience and brought him to a new level of understanding. “The Internet reflects your passion! Mean what you’re doing – be honest about it. Put out a good product consistently and the audience will forgive your mistakes.”

Ari Greenberg, Partner and Head of the TV Group at WME, discussed the voluminous change that

took the television industry from 4 buyers 20 years ago to the current scenario of 57 buyers for scripted programming and a total of 100 companies that are either broadcasting or producing content. He notes that the biggest change over the past 20 years is that “everything has changed! Aaron Sorkin hit a hit with everything that conventional wisdom said could never succeed.” Greenberg believes that “the best change is that we’re off the ‘you have to have 150 episodes to make money’ theory. Now a 50 episode show can be a major money maker with just a few seasons.”

When the topic turned to unscripted programming, nobody does it better than Thom Beers. After building Original Productions on what he terms “testosterone television,” Beers took the helm at Fremantle North America. He addressed the transition of networks and cables channels with a concern that, “People have a clear view of what they want to make and there is a conflict between the creators and the networks.” Beers is worried that we used to have more individual voices. “Now, it’s become so collaborative that it’s homogenous. “ But on more practical business terms, “the challenge we’re all having is the strange and weird trend that the talent comes out of nowhere and they all want insane amounts of money by season 3.” Within 3 seasons of Storage wars, the talent wanted so much money that he re-created Storage Wars in different locations with different cast. “Recasting the show keeps the show fresh.” But, essentially, the cost of reality talent is becoming difficult to manage. “Unfortunately, budgets get smaller and smaller and you don’t have time to let things evolve,” he explains. “We shoot what we shoot and that’s it.”

At this point, the conference broke for lunch. That’s right – all of these expert authorities were in the lineup before lunch. This is what makes the Variety Summit series the best ticket in town. Next up, Variety will host the Digital Marketing & Analytics Summit on September 24th at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills. October 20th brings the Entertainment & Technology Summit at The Ritz Carlton Hotel, in conjunction with Digital Hollywood. See you there!

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