

Formats reign in rainy Cannes

Yellow American school buses driving up and down the Croisette promoting Fremantle's new Prettiest Girl in the Class reality format; identikit siblings on every street corner pushing Sony-backed Tuvalu Media's talent show Twinzz; Uri Geller on the C21 stand for a bout of spoon-bending, to promote SevenOne's The Successor/The Next Uri Geller talent format...

Welcome to MipTV. This week has so far seen plenty of format-related news, conference sessions and product launches to keep C21's Formats Lab technicians busy. Deals came thick and fast: Time Team going into the US; Single Moms picked up by TLC; Trivial Pursuits picked up in Spain; Village on a Diet localised in Denmark. A veritable swarm of Singing Bee adaptations was announced by Zeal, which told of deals in no less than 27 territories, including major markets like Spain (Antena 3), Italy (Rai), Holland (RTL4), France and Germany.

But this market was all about Japanese formats, at least according to the conference agenda. Cue **Small World IFT's** timely sale of its **Big in Japan** gameshow/reality hybrid into Australia and the UK, and news that FremantleMedia has sold Hole in the Wall (left) into 16 territories, including the US (Fox), the UK (BBC), Russia, Italy, China, India and Brazil. Ditto Dragons' Den, now sold into 20 markets by Sony, including the UK, Australia, Canada, Russia, Sweden and Holland.

The Japanese format theme continued in conference sessions, with one in which the panel discussed the growth of the Japanese formats business in recent years. "British, American and Dutch formats dominate the business but there is a lot of similarity in their game mechanisms, and look and feel," said Greg Bellon, of NYC-based vendor of Japanese formats, Bellon Entertainment. "Networks are increasingly looking for something completely different and the Japanese networks are supplying them."

While Japan is certainly prolific in its format creation, Asia's biggest format factory by a long chalk, one of the most common perceptions of them is that they are great segments but often wouldn't work as half-hours or hours. "I can understand Hole in the Wall being part of a show but not the whole show," said fellow panelist Jin Kurihara, producer/director at Nippon Television Network.

"Well, it is," countered Rob Clark (left), senior exec VP of entertainment and production, worldwide entertainment, at FremantleMedia. He then

went on to list the territories that the format is working as half-hours or hours. It was a long list. "Only in Italy is the format part of another show. It's great family entertainment and in Denmark it increased the slot average by 500%. Celebrities falling in the water makes everyone laugh."

The success of that other big Japanese show, Dragons' Den, was explained by Kurihara, who created, produced and directed the NTV original. "There was nothing artificial about it," he said. "No music, no studio, no real direction. I wanted it to be as real as possible, so there was no stagefright from the participants." NTV is now planning a version that brings together clips from all the international versions.

One interesting thing to emerge from the session was the central role of YouTube in allowing Western distributors to discover interesting formats from overseas. Like Hole in the Wall, NTV's Silent Library was picked up after clips were spotted on the video site. "I watched a clip of a man getting his bottom spanked with a baseball bat," confessed Taco Ketelaar (left), chief creative officer at Dutch firm 2waytraffic, which consequently picked up certain non-English-speaking rights to the Silent Library format. "Pain seems to be an important part of Japanese television."

But the best comment in the session came from Kurihara. When asked why so many Japanese formats are now selling into the West but so few are going the other way, he simply said: "Whenever a new Western format is pitched in to NTV we often think they are very similar to the formats we were doing five or 10 years ago." Food for thought for format folks here in Cannes.

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10 Apr 2008
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