

Brasil

Spanning the Globo

Old Media that Looks Young

I love Globo. I think their flagship Brazilian network, Rede Globo, understands television better than anyone in the world, which is why they're probably the world's most successful network if you created some index of size, share, and profitability.

Sure, the Americans and Chinese might have more viewers, Kim Jong-Il probably gets a 100 share (although Globo has come close in its history), and Globo isn't making as much money as they used to, but damned if they don't make the most addictive programming on the planet.

When I arrived in Brazil, the Southern Hemisphere summer was just getting underway. My friends in Europe and the States were envious at the prospect of me soaking up the heat and sunning at the beach. Little did they know I was locked in my hotel room for 17 hours two full days a week. You could call it studying, but it was worse. I could not stop watching Globo. I'd flip on the TV and start with *Bom Dia Brasil*. Less stupid than *Today* or *GMA*, not as dry as the Beeb, I'd get *café da manha* sent up in time for Ana Maria Braga and *Mais Você* (More You), follow that into *TV Xuxa*, then the lunchtime news, where I might take a peek at Record or SBT, but not too long before *Video Show*, which is kind of like *Entertainment Tonight* minus Mary Hart and all those epileptic noises and graphics, then an afternoon soap or a movie, which is when I went to MTV Brasil for the music research. I'd come back for the teenybopper novela *Malbaço* (flirting with Mexican import *Rebelde* on SBT). Not a fan of historical drama, I'd have a snack during the "six novela" (they're named in Brazil by their broadcast time, which corresponds to genre), but I wouldn't miss the seven and eight *Pé Na Jaca* and *Paginas Da Vida*. I'd follow up with *Big Brother Brasil*, maybe a late night series, and then flip to the religious channels for research when *Lost* came on. The nice part is that I could miss a day or two, come back, and the exact same schedule would be on, as Globo uses a completely fixed programming grid. You know exactly what is on and when, and it's the same across the weeknights, with Sunday's consisting of a good couple of hours of *Faustão*, where David Letterman meets *Sabado Gigante* with a little Donny and Marie (Sandy and Junior, who I saw "retire") plus *Dancing with the Stars*, followed by what has to be the most absorbing newsmagazine I've seen, *Fantastico*, a kind of

news-you-can-use *60 Minutes* meets *Sesame Street* hosted (at the time) by a beautiful mature black woman named Gloria Maria. The beach would have to wait for a real vacation.

It was the one-two punch of *Mais Você* and *TV Xuxa* that got me into my day, every day, and I was thrilled to have met both hostesses under different circumstances. I ran into Xuxa in the TAM lounge at Guarulhos, a simple, “Hi love your work” passing in the corridor, to which she was quite gracious, and quite tall. I was sad to hear of her cancellation, but maybe the shorties need something new. As for *Mais Você*, an attractive women in a slinky backless chiffon top trimmed by crystals (at eight o’clock in the morning!) came on, looked me right in the eye and asked me to join her as we wrap gifts for Father Christmas and make some hors d’oeuvres. She then proceeded to have a conversation with a parrot puppet, try to sell me some makeup remover or something like that, and then came the moment I was transfixed: making meatballs. Ana Maria put on some plastic gloves rather than insert her exquisitely manicured hands into the raw meat, except one of the gloves got caught on a rock on her finger the size of Sugarloaf, tearing it vertically. But she just blew right past that little flaw and obliviously plunged her hands in, rolling the meat around in sesame seeds and nuts, all the while keeping that backless top hanging perfectly and explaining to the parrot puppet every few minutes, and to me, as she had invited me personally, why she was doing what she was doing. I understood at this moment that she was no Brazilian Martha Stewart. If Martha even knew she existed she could only *wish* she could be Ana Maria Braga. (Yes, she’s Sônia’s sister, and her daughter Alice was in *City of God*.)

After telling everyone of my obsession with Ana Maria Braga’s morning program, the very kind Jacques Lew pulled a string and got me a meeting. Beia Carvalho took me to the Globo São Paulo fortress in Itaim Bibi, the home of the magazine and auditorium shows, while novelas and news were in Rio. I brought Beia along for those moments when I lost my Portuguese, but in reality Ana Maria would have made herself understood in any language. Because she liked the idea of *BRIC Pop*, our meeting got me on the next day’s *Mais Você* program, sitting in the middle of a debate on abortion between a priest and the head of an pro-choice organization as I suddenly developed a persistent and distracting cough on national television. Seeing the Globo operation from the inside out, it completely holds its own to the US networks and manages to be warm and civilized compared to the dingy makeshift studios I’ve endured in New York and Los Angeles.

How to Be Brazilian

Brazilians in the media industries don’t seem to think much of Globo. I think they find it retrograde, and it is. But that doesn’t make it bad. You can talk about the Marinho family, the dictatorship, politics, monopolies and all the externalities, but it only obscures the core truth: their product is really excellent television. There is a “Standard of Quality” system developed by the longtime former head of programming, Jose Bonifacio Sobrinho, that has enshrined best practices in scripts, editing, casting, performance, story development, and visual appeal, tested and validated through the

by-the-minute Brazilian ratings system. It seems less sophisticated when you start watching it compared to our whiz bang whoosh super busy American screens, but then you realize after a few viewings how deceiving the simplicity can be, and that the total package may in fact be *more* sophisticated. I'm a little afraid of them.

As a network, Globo reminded me of all of the promises of the medium as it was introduced by David Sarnoff at the 1939 World's Fair or during the 1950s Golden Age of American television, not dissimilar to all of the promises of the Internet made weekly for the last 10 years by the latest college dropout entrepreneur-du-jour. Television would bring culture and convenience to the family, help housewives with recipes and homemaking, entertain people with programming they might not see in smaller towns and rural villages, help kids with their homework, inform the nation of current events around the world, and serve the local community. The thing about Globo is that it's built on ratings grabbers like novelas, variety shows, and often sensational news just like any other network, but it still has that small-town feel to it, like you and they are a kind of family. Their tagline, "*A gente se vê por aqui*," loosely translates to "we see each other around here." And we do. I think Globo teaches Brazilians about being Brazilian through other Brazilians, and still does, when that same societal role of a the massest mass medium seems to have been lost by Western networks to a era of microtarget audiences and channel fragmentation. They've kept more of the original human promise of the medium while updating the production values.

If you're thinking Globo is just old media in a developing market, it's what the parent conglomerate, Organizações Globo does with the portfolio that makes the package anything but old. Rede Globo, the main network, the newspapers, magazines, radio stations, film and video divisions, globo.com, portals, ISPs, and international arm can act big and horizontal or small and vertical. It's less bought that built, branded through-the-line, and can globalize when it needs to. Unlike the Western conglomerates, it's focus has been Brazil-first up until now, with globalization a function of what Globo properties will export.

Just as a TV-centric media conglomerate seems so behind it's actually ahead, so does a Brazil-centric content menu. Globo International makes most of its money selling novelas overseas for dubbing and broadcast, with the latest two domestic hits, *Paginas da Vida* and *Paraiso Tropical*, set to show up in living rooms around the world. They've been doing it this way from the days that *Escrava Isaura* in the 1970s made Lucelia Santos a household name in China. The new international programming game isn't who can be the next *Baywatch* or *CSI* but the next Betty or Idol. Format sales allow you to license the concept, outsource, share or spread the production costs, create more localized product, extend a programs reach. Globo is just getting into this area, and their doing it with their tried and true novelas, which is where I think they're missing an opportunity in their news and talk formats. If I were a network executive in West Africa or Southeast Asia, would I rather create my own version of *Newsnight*, *A Current Affair* or *60 Minutes*, or give *Fantastico*, *Jornal Nacional* or *Fatos e Versões* a try? I think Globo's formats are better built to travel cross-culture and more relevant for markets where content must scale in relevance for a horizontal audience across urban, rural and

social class. While I admire Globo's focus on Brazil and think it necessary in the face of intense domestic competition from Record and SBT, I think they're leaving a little on the table by focusing primarily on novelas and program exports and not all-genre licensing. I want a Cambodian *Faustão*.

Intimacy and Interactivity—aren't those Web Words?

Ana Maria Braga didn't necessarily agree with me that a program like *Mais Você* could travel, or that it needed to. It was designed so specifically for a Brazilian audience, would it lose something in the translation? Xuxa tried to come to the US in the early nineties, and as I watched this historical trainwreck on YouTube, with Xuxa and the children turned into prim missionaries, her cheerful "Bom dia" turned into a foreign consulate "Heello," I could see Ana Maria's point.

But the *Mais Você* formula worked for Brazil. That little "look the viewer" in the eye trick at the beginning is no kitschy accident, proven from as far back as Dave Garroway's *Today*. Ana Maria explained her philosophy, "We make it intimate and personal for the average viewer. There's a balance between the quality of production, which we've been a pioneer in—the lights, the cinematography—and a characteristic that makes each viewer receptive through believability and sincerity."

Wanting some trash talk, I asked her to compare *Mais Você* with American morning television or Martha Stewart.

It's presented in a more distant way. Very beautiful, but not very practical. I try to make it suitable for the average person, not just the A-class. We have things for the cities, and also to make it attainable for the cities of the interior. José Louro (the parrot) is there to act as the average person's point-of-view. He asks the questions that you might ask while watching at home.

Damn, that's right out of *Blue's Clues*. Portray the viewer talking back. As bizarre as José sounds in theory, it's no weirder (and a little smarter) than Sherri Shepherd on *The View*.

Ana Maria went on to confirm a lot of my ideas about Globo and the television medium. I found it amazing that we were having this McLuhanesque conversation about whether TV was mass or 1:1, warm or cool, the role of interactivity, emotion and intimacy when one is trying to put together a diverse audience of millions. I've seen some blooper clips where she may not have asked the brightest questions, but she had a media studies professor's acumen with what the medium could do. And this is why Globo can still get a 50+ share in a diverse market of nearly 200 million viewers. They understood far more quickly than the American networks that intimacy and interactivity were always a part of the television experience, and how new media can extend rather than replace an audience relationship. Ever notice how on the big-box reality shows and event television, people like Ryan Seacrest talk to us like we're an audience of millions, addressing to "all of you out there." *Faustão*, on the other hand, talks to *você* first, and if it's *vocês*, it might be you and your family, or your neigh-

bors, but not the whole country. Even Carnival coverage is designed to take you, the individual viewer, to what's going on in the *Sambódromo*. More connected, less collected.

After my Globo experience, I was left puzzled by something. I've had more invitations to attend seminars, give interviews and share ideas from the Brazilian media and marketing industry than any other in the world, even before *BRIC Pop*. They're always bringing *gringos* down to tell the all the wonderful things we're doing with grainy, tiny videos, putting desperate real people on television, phone calls that drop in three minutes, and quirky, ironic, sepia-toned ads that don't travel. I rarely see a Brazilian up on an international marketing or media stage telling us what that Standard of Quality actually is, how to bring together an audience separated by race, income, geography, ethnicity, accent, age, religion, and morality, or how to keep your old revenue stream up and running while integrating it with the new. One of two things is going on here: 1) they're taking notes, and they'll keep taking notes as we give it all away to another ascending market that studies us more than we do them, or 2) we're there to validate their suspicion that they've been doing it right all along. I'm onto you, Brazil, and I'm not telling you a thing until you tell me what you know.

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