

**From:** Barry Lazar [<mailto:barrylazar@videotron.ca>]  
**Sent:** Friday, October 18, 2013 9:32 AM  
**To:** Stéphane Cardin  
**Cc:** Lisa Fitzgibbons  
**Subject:** Thoughts on regional programming

Hi Stéphane - The afternoon session of the CMF forum in Montreal was useful. As I mentioned to you at the end, I wanted to bring up a few concerns about regional programming. They go directly to the strategic objectives noted in the slide deck, particularly to "ensure diversity of voices from a regional language and point of view perspective".

My career, as such, began with CBC in the early 1970s. At that time, there was a lot of regional and even local story telling, in the sense of focussing on Montreal as a source of local stories. Local TV programming on both English language Montreal stations included drama, current affairs, quiz shows and sit-coms. All of these could easily be seen and produced in Montreal for a local audience. There was no criterion that it must work for a national audience to be produced here.

The broadcasting landscape has changed dramatically but I would think that a key component of regional programming is to encourage broadcasters to support programming that is regional, not just to hire production companies from the regions. The latter forces me to find national stories that can be produced locally. The former encourages broadcasters to work with local producers to create stories that may only generate strong interest regionally or locally.

This, of course, is the model of CBC radio. Where local programming succeeds, it succeeds because it tells stories that people in particular regions relate to.

This is of particular concern to English language regional documentary producers - and perhaps the same is true of those working in French in regional broadcasting. We tell stories. As a documentary producer, since 1995, almost all of the one-offs we have developed are supported initially, and often only, by local French broadcasters: Although these stories are conceived of in English, almost all of our films - *Chez Schwartz, Il était deux fois un Jardin / Twice Upon a Garden, My Dear Clara, Nothing Sacred* and others - received their primary licenses from Télé-Québec, SRC, ARTV and currently Canal D. There are no longer any equivalents on the English side in Quebec: CTV, CBC and Global do not have slots for anything more than token regional current affairs programming or budgets that would support local stories beyond a newscast. The local CBC fund for summer programming, for example, offers a few thousand dollars. Unless a show has been produced, *but has not been broadcast*, even that is not available. You could not take that amount and actually make anything.

A long time ago, in a land far, far away, there was a man named Bill Merrill at a station called CFCF-TV. Producers could approach him with strong ideas - that might only work locally - and receive enough money to get a project off the ground. When produced, they might only be shown to a primarily Montreal audience. Bill passed away many years ago and his judgement and support are missed. CFCF was absorbed into CTV and with it went funds for anything but token local current affairs programming. Bill supported local productions because his station let him administer funds to support one-offs. The station knew that key to its success was a strong rapport with its audience which it got by telling local stories. Current efforts such as Videotron's MYtv, CITY-TV (Montreal) or the new multi-lingual ethnic station ICI, are not changing anything. We have been told, for example, that CITY-TV will make all

programming decisions in Toronto and that anything proposed from Montreal must work for a national base.

We can't turn back the clock but we can recommend that regional programming actually be regional. For example, broadcasters might be told that a portion of their envelope must support regional programming, not just production companies. Of course, the CRTC would have to encourage this in its conditions of license. Similarly a portion of funds such as the English regional or POV fund could be partially directed to incubate and produce truly regional programming. Carrots and sticks are both useful.

This might lead to several things:

- It would provide incubation funding and mentoring from local broadcasters for new projects and producers or directors who are getting started.
- It would enable local stories to be told to an English regional audience when that is the language the story is told in and the characters speak.
- Producers would not have to skew stories to work primarily for a francophone audience (sub-titling, dubbing, over-emphasizing minor characters who speak French, etc.)
- English language audiences would see their world reflected on the stations they watch.

I know that you will be addressing regional programming in Nov and trust that this will be taken into consideration.

Again, thanks for conducting these forums. I look forward to seeing the results,

with best regards, Barry

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