

SALFORD SEMINARS 2010 MEET THE COMMISSIONERS

The newly formed Children's Media Conference, formerly known as the Showcomotion Conference, was commissioned by Screen Agency, Northwest Vision and Media to produce three informational seminars, designed to stimulate production companies of various types based in the north of England to consider the opportunities in working in the children's sector in the future.

The first of the three seminars: "Meet the Commissioners" - was a chance to hear from (and quiz) some of the key broadcasters engaged in commissioning content for kids in the UK. It was produced and presented by Anthony Utlely (ex MD of Cosgrove Hall Films) and took place as an all-day event at the Northwest Vision and Media Headquarters in Salford Quays on the 28th January 2010.

For those of you who couldn't make it, here's how the key commissioners set out their stall on a damp Salford afternoon. Information was also provided by companies unable to attend the event – CITV and Nickelodeon UK. The structure was straightforward – each speaker had an hour to present and answer questions from the audience. Then they were shuffled off for their one-to-ones to get a chance to meet the locals

After Anthony Utlely's introduction, exec producer CBBC Commissioning Unit Melissa Hardinge (silent 'e') was first up, standing in for Damian Kavanagh who sent his apologies but was caught up in the middle of his first commissioning round.

MELISSA HARDINGE - Executive Producer CBBC Commissioning Unit

Melissa gave a comprehensive presentation, explaining the ethos, set-up, structure and commissioning process at CBBC.



The Commissioning Unit itself consists of:

Alison Gregory, alison.gregory@bbc.co.uk

Bridget Banton bridget.banton@bbc.co.uk

Melissa Hardinge melissa.hardinge@bbc.co.uk

Rebecca Shallcross rebecca.shallcross@bbc.co.uk

Catherine McAllister catherine.mcallister@bbc.co.uk

Sue Nott is the commissioning exec for independent drama Sue.nott@bbc.co.uk

Their target is children aged 6-12. They deliver content across a whole mix of genres that will empower excite and entertain. Their slogan – they're on a "thrilling, thought-provoking mission to entertain".



Melissa ran a showreel of CBBC output in the last year to demonstrate.

CHANNEL GOAL

Child-focused. Provide positive role models. Help kids understand themselves and the world. Empower children to become active citizens. Encourage them to be active and try something new. Give them moments to laugh and be silly. Create content that will be remembered for a lifetime by the audience.

CHALLENGES

Retain and grow audiences. Honour the trust of parents and kids. Make brands sing out in a fragmented world.

THEMES

There are some key themes to be found across the output: Friendship, strong characters, aspirational/fantasy powers, dramas always at heart set in reality, Good Always Triumphs, kids want to feel part of something bigger.



Things to avoid: adult-kids confrontations (audience finds this uncomfortable), too much of a fantasy setting, non-aspirational characters, complex narratives.

RELEVANCE

Content **MUST** be relevant: must be set in worlds that kids recognise. Ask a question of your concept: why would this matter to or inspire a 9 year old? It's always a good idea to canvas kids yourselves and find out what they are worried about or into.



STONE

CBBC's tone is cheeky, fun, upbeat and energetic. Shows should speak to kids in their language. Don't forget – this is not schools telly, and CBBC's job is not educating. **HOWEVER** - education can slip through where it's appropriate: *Horrible Histories* is a good example.



INFECTIOUSNESS

A key aim is to make shows which are viral and infectious: kids should talk about CBBC programmes and share the ideas in the playground. Try and create a real emotional engagement. Strong characters, catchphrases, format points, music can all do this. Iain and Hacker in CBBC's live Presentation/On Air (who are very popular with the audience) are spot on and a good guide.

TALENT

Try and surprise us with new talent. There is nothing worse than rent-a-presenter. Think big, think comedy: it's surprising how many major comedy names are interested in participating in Children's TV. The Skins model is interesting too - taking newcomers and breaking them.

SUBJECT MATTER

Nothing is out of bounds. Docs and *Newsround* specials have covered difficult areas. But please - not mini versions of adult shows (*X-Factor* for kids is a no-no).

DIVERSITY

Incredibly important. Need to be non London, regional. Want to avoid the channel being seen as middle class and very English. However - not interested in shows for example specifically about disabled characters as separate from the mainstream, the channel wants to represent diversity within the mainstream.

CBBC INTERACTIVE

There are two ways a company can work with CBBC Interactive:

1. Commissioning – with the company's own IP
2. Through BBC suppliers list – as the equivalent of “service providers” making parts of or taking on internal projects.

INTERACTIVE STRATEGY

CBBC wants to stay at the vanguard. It plans to build on the re-launches of the two channels.

MULTI PLATFORM APPROACH

Fewer-bigger-better is the ethos to multi-platform. Gaming is a key part of the service – but it must be brand or character driven.

COMMISSIONING ROUND

They are coming to the end of the current round. 600 ideas came in – and 3 people read each one. There are 20 that make it through to the final round. These 20 are then invited to come in and pitch. There's an internal debate going on about continuing the current system of 2 rounds a year or moving to a rolling commissioning system like Cbeebies.

CBBC works with a wide range of indies.

QUESTIONS

Drama commissioning – how does that work? Ideas are whittled down to 12 then development funding is allocated for scripts to be written. Sue Nott is the contact for indies. Sue.nott@bbc.co.uk

Do you really do stuff for over tens? Factual and challenging dramas do reach that upper end audience. There is a 'sort of' relationship with BBC Switch so that theoretically projects can cross over.

What's the ratio of in-house to indie commissioning? 50% is in house; 25% must be by independents; 25% is in the WOCC meaning it is up for grabs by both.

Is the channel really looking for British themed animation? Absolutely! The channel is about commissioning British content. "We want to make British TV for British children."

Rolling commissioning is a dialogue – but how will that work in the next 18 months? Does it not unfairly favour the bigger indies? This is a debate that's still going on. For the moment indies are advised to make full use of the contact names above between commissioning rounds to discuss ideas, get them rolling so when the round comes up you are ready.

DANIEL LENNARD – VP ORIGINAL SERIES AND DEVELOPMENT CARTOON NETWORK

Daniel showed a general content reel of last year's output – and explained that the channel is actually a bit more varied than people might think and also younger skewing.

The channel's content is aimed at a core audience of 6-11. Comedy animation embraces 4-9, live action a bit older. *Ben Ten* goes down to 4 even. The channel is now branching out into live action, comedy and adventure – with the emphasis on comedy.

Daniel showed some clips of more recent shows and explained: *Hero 108* – is an action comedy copro with Germania. 26 half-hours. It's a typical copro. *Chops* and *Robot Boy* are also good examples. In thinking about content he had a word of warning: comedy and action in one show is always a compromise, and difficult to get right, he said. So in terms of what he's now looking for he's more comfortable with proposals which are either just comedy or just action.

CN has been doing a lot of in-house development recently. Showed clips of *Cosmo* and *100 Head Eddie*. However, both have proved to be quite expensive.

A word of warning: straight hero shows are done so well in the US he believes it's much harder to do it here in the UK.

When it comes to comedy the absolute key is a "Loveable breakout character that makes you laugh". He then showed clips of *Pinky Malinky*, *Elliot's Zoo*, and *Verne on Vacation*.

Specific areas that he's interested in: there's a desire to do more for kids 3-5. Particularly themes of discovery and play.

Finally, he took us through the bible for the animated series *Gumball*, which was very well received in all the different CN territories. *Gumball* is a live action background show with 2D and 3D characters. Kind of a *Simpons*-lite family sitcom.

Any enquiries from indies with projects should go to Richard.rowe@turner.com director of acquisitions and original series.

QUESTIONS

What's your multiplatform strategy? Ask Richard, wait for Michael Carrington! Original series will be organised alongside acquisitions; everything will be more joined up and the system will be made quicker for feedback. (“I empathise with the fact that it’s hard here to build animation of the storyboarding qualities of the US”).

Female characters – there don't seem to be many? 3-5 strategy might skew a bit more towards the girls, but the channel’s really boy-directed.

Live action? The intention is to do more in that area. Looking for the great live action comedies. However – they need to have an international feel so that they will sell around Europe.

British voices? They start out with the best intentions, but the high octane stuff tends to just go American in the casting.

Budgets for live action? Still in discussion, we need to wait for when Michael Carrington arrives at the Channel.

What's the detail required when pitching? A couple of paragraphs and a couple of designs to know it’s got potential. Then if they like it they’ll do a development deal to move it ahead. But to go ahead there needs to be buy-in from other territories.

BETH GARDINER - VP GLOBAL ORIGINAL PROGRAMMING PLAYHOUSE DISNEY
ORION ROSS – VP ORIGINAL SERIES DISNEY CHANNEL EMEA

GENERAL ETHOS

All three channels are looking for really great characters and storytelling. They need a lot of content to feed 3 hungry brands. “Shameless optimism of our brands and characters embodies them. You can do whatever you want: dream big, choose right and you will be rewarded with a happy shiny place”.



BETH GARDINER - PLAYHOUSE

Playhouse is Disney’s preschool channel throughout the world. 2-6 is the age range. The “sweet spot” is a 4 year old. “We think about the parent and the family, and stories that make their kids feel safe.” It’s a combination of happy endings and learning. Most of Disney’s shows have an underlying curriculum element – she and her team will help you find that when you pitch. So don’t be scared of that word: it’s basically the show philosophy - what you want the kid to take away from your show.





Beth showed *Special Agent Oso*, a series which reflects the trend towards interactive.

Also *Jungle Junction* – which she explained is a good example of how the curriculum skills at Disney enhanced the show. The original jungle-set animals on wheels concept was tweaked to include curriculum themes of the environment and reading signs.

Finally, Beth reiterated that she's looking for all kinds of shows – the channel output is like a portfolio – there's a broad range. She likes to have a conversation with producers at an early stage: a pitch might not be exactly what she's looking for but there might be an element of your pitch which she likes and which she can develop. She also confirmed that they test a LOT with kids throughout production.

On Playhouse, Disney will fully fund shows.

ORION ROSS – DISNEY CHANNEL AND DISNEY XD

The older channels do for big kids what Beth does with the little ones. Shows have to work in the UK, and Europe and ultimately across the world.

DISNEY CHANNEL



Orion's mantra is that it's "primetime for tweens". Core target is kids 8-12. The whole demographic of the Disney Channel is 6-14. The aim is that kids' favourite shows should all be on Disney – and that they are all high quality. As an example he showed *Fineas and Ferb*,



which works well on both channels and for boys and girls. Also showed a slide of new show *Fishhooks* – the next Disney show which is going to be big.

The Disney Channel is ultimately girl skewed. Driven by *High School Musical* and *Hannah Montana* - live action shows from the US. He's really looking for animated shows from the UK that will complement these shows. What kind of animation could sit next to *Hannah*?

DISNEY XD



Orion described the channel as a "boy-driven, girl-inclusive network". Age range is as the Disney Channel with a slightly older skew. It's comedy-driven. Orion showed clips of *I'm in the Band* and *Kick Buttowski* (pictured) as examples of the channel's output.



Orion also explained that the success of the US imports is allowing them now to develop stuff in the UK. These might be wholly owned Disney properties or they could be co-pros: *Jimmy Twoshoes*, *Kid vs Kat* *Rekkid Rabbit* are all co-pros which came out of the UK.



OVERALL ANNUAL TARGETS

7 original long-form series per year for Europe

One for Playhouse, two for Disney Channel, four for Disney XD

182 half hours altogether

14 pilots per year

30+ projects in dev

Plus returning series.

HOW TO PITCH

Watch the channels so you know what you are doing. “The best pitches for us are conversations. It’s about you the creator, you the producer and the kind of show you want to do.” Technically we don’t take unsolicited pitches. But email us and we can sort something.

QUESTIONS

What about the girls? Girls grow out of the 11 minute slot. They look for more complexity at an earlier age. So better storytelling and layered characters are what they look for.

Only scripted stuff? Not necessarily – if it’s a great idea for the brand we wouldn’t say no. But at heart, story is what we are looking for. Short form is also an option though we really need half hour shows to drive the schedule.

What about the IP? Disney traditionally takes the IP but in the case of co-pros the IP rests with the originator, though these shows will be pushed less by the channels, as the own will carry all the ancillary revenue opportunities direct to Disney. In the past perhaps we used to be inflexible but we still want key properties so there are more flexible ways now of dealing with IP issues.

Cross platform? It’s a given that all shows have to be cross platform/cross media. And anyway - if it’s got a great character it will work across platforms. And we don’t mean just digital. Comic books, graphic novels etc all are useful as source material for shows.

Only interested in 2D animation? No, whatever comes along. Stop motion, Flash, anything that suits the story and budget.

MICHAEL CARRINGTON – DEPARTING CONTROLLER, CBEBBIES

Michael gave a brief overview of the history of the channel since launch in Feb 2002. The channel has been a great success: it's now gone global from Poland to Singapore.

AUDIENCE

Target: Children under 6 and their parents/carers. It's the latter who get them in front of the box and the PC.

Concepts and qualities that underscore the vision: creative, imaginative, stimulating, high quality, trusted. Happy, energetic, enthusiastic, playful, curious, innocent, with learning values and discovery.

"An entertainment network guided by the curriculum, but not led by it."

Our approach: multi-genre safe content that will engage, stimulate and stretch the imagination. Presentation is by real people – it gives a connection and relevance. Only after it's grounded, can fantasy kick in. Learning through play is a key part of the philosophy.

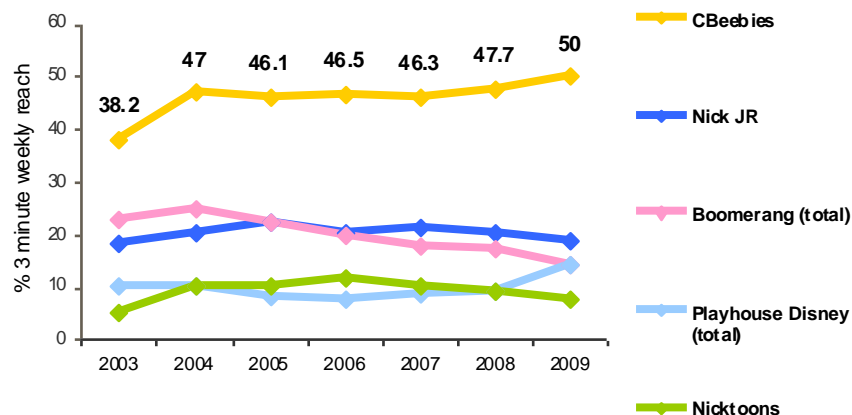
Commissioning framework: 50% in-house, 25% indie, 25% Window of Creative Competition (WOCC).

90% of the output is UK-produced.

The channel is multi genre. The audience is treated as two groups: 2-4 years old, 4-6 years old. Michael is proud of the fact that the audience is 50/50 boys and girls.

Schedule is shaped to reflect the daily lives of kids and the family. There are four blocks: Get Set Go (0600); Discover and Do (0900); Big Fun Time (1500); Bedtime Hour (1800).

How is CBeebies doing? The channel has a reach three times the competition. 50% reach – 3 million of the 6 million kids available. Plus 2 million unique users on the website.



All the media they make – radio, TV, interactive, online - comes out of one budget.

The channel is commissioned up to 2011. So there's plenty of time to get developing projects and talking to development people. Over the last year CBeebies in-house teams have been out and about starting to make connections in the regions.

QUESTIONS

Explain acquisition/commission?

With acquisitions – the BBC inputs 10% of the budget for broadcast licence. This may not seem much but we will help you develop the show creatively, and the BBC's involvement will mean the show is easier to sell into other territories.

Commissions – we try to invest as much as we can. We commission roughly 12-18 series a year. Not 100 percent funded, generally around 25-30% but we will help you to find the rest of the budget.

What online commitment do you make? All programmes have at least one page on the site minimum. There is then arrange of options depending o the needs and opportunities [presented by the project content. At the extreme you might be looking at a complete immersive world.

How about factual programming? Unlike animation, we would probably have to 100% fund that.

Who are our points of contact? The Controller controls the budget and the decisions. Interactive team – Marc Goodchild for in-house; Rebecca Shallcross for Indies; Jackie Edwards for animation; Sarah Colclough for external production.

Will the move to Salford and the thinner staff base give more opportunity for local indie supply? 32% of in-house will make the move to Salford. 70% of the jobs will therefore need to be recruited. We will need to make connections with indies both in TV and interactive. There will be great opportunities!

What's the best time to get in contact given there's a rolling commissioning process? Our new budgets come into play in April. But between Christmas and April we sometimes have left-over cash for quick projects. Mip in April and Mipcom are the two anchors we work around – just before or during those periods is the time to pitch. That is when we are looking for new concepts, directions. But talk to us – that's the most important thing. Get in touch, chat etc before you pitch. You should feel that once CBeebies is in Salford it should be easier to drop in for informal conversations with the commissioning team.

A lot of our big shows have taken between 3 and 9 years to get to screen. Don't expect to get rich quick of course: it can be 5 years before you start to get the money back...

With that – Anthony Utley gave thanks to all who came and listened or spoke – and broke open the beers, wines and sandwiches...;)

CITV and Nickelodeon UK provided the following information for delegates at the seminar:



CITV's purpose is to kick off children's relationship with ITV by being Britain's children's entertainment brand. Uniquely targeted at two distinct age groups, a preschool school audience and a school age audience of 4-9 year olds, the channel offers the very best in fun and entertainment for children with a wide mix of award winning programmes. The schedule includes some of CITV's already hugely popular programmes, such as *Horrid Henry*, *Emu*, *Curious George*, *Pocoyo* and *Tricky TV*.

Commissions over the past year have included a 5th series of our make and do format *Fingertips* and series 2 of popular comedy drama *Emu* and most recently a 2nd series of BAFTA award winning *Bookaboo*, and a 3rd series of the hugely popular entertainment format *Tricky TV*.

We have also had great success across 2009 in working in partnership with advertisers and well known brands. *Green Up Your Life* - a ten part factual entertainment show in collaboration with British Gas, *Wild World* – a ten part wild life series for the younger viewer in collaboration with Kids Activity Days, *Skillicious* – a high energy entertainment format in collaboration with Britvic Fruitshoots H2O and *Farm Camp* – a ten part factual entertainment series in collaboration with Morrison's. We work very closely with our commercial sales teams to build our relationships with advertisers and we hope to bring more AFP's to CITV in 2010 and going forward.

CITV no longer is able to fully fund commissions so any ideas which are submitted to us will need to have some funding or co-production in place. We are open to working on a pre-buy or straight acquisition basis as well as commissioning. We are currently in negotiation with 3 production companies to commission 3 new shows for 2010 therefore our commission budget has been spent for 2010. In terms of acquisitions, we have a very small budget remaining for 2010 which we anticipate will be used to pick up an animated show for our after school weekday slots.

Below are a few CITV facts:

- CITV is the highest rating commercial children’s channel, as well as the only commercial children’s channel available free on Freeview.
- Looking at all children’s channels (including non-commercial) CITV is the 4th best performing dedicated children’s channel and the 3rd best performing for 4-9s.
- CITV reaches on average 1.4 million children per week which is 18% of the children population*.
- The creation of CITV Minis in November 2009 led to an overall share rise of 14% from week 45 onwards.



*in multi-channel homes



Nickelodeon UK Networks

Nickelodeon UK currently comprises four channels with very specific needs. The network targets children aged 2-12 years old and can be broken down into the following.

Nickelodeon is home to all our key shows with a specific focus on Live Action Comedy. Successful titles include *iCarly*, *Drake and Josh* and *H2O*.

Nicktoons is home to all our animation (although our top toons also appear on Nickelodeon). This is where you will find the unforgettable *Spongebob*, *Fairly Odd Parents* and *The Penguins of Madagascar* amongst others. We look to acquire comedy driven animation but will consider action series if they have a comedy skew. This channel is aimed primarily at boys aged 6-9, although it has broad appeal.

2009 BAFTA award winning **Nick Jr** is our dedicated pre-school channel with a target of 2-5 year olds. Our programming should encourage the child to “join in with the adventure” as opposed to passively view. We have many strong brands on these channels such as *Dora the Explorer*, *Ben and Holly’s Little Kingdom*, *Humf*, *Peppa Pig* and many others.



We are always looking for laugh out loud live action ideas for Big Nick that are unique and kid-centric, and since 1995 have run a hugely successful pilot scheme where we produce a pilot episode and then research it fully with our audience before moving to series commission. This has born, most notably, *Genie in the House* which was sold into 100 territories. 2010 will see us launch another brand new live action series which is being fully produced in the U.K with RDF. We are also looking for new ways in

which to fund and produce great U.K. content and our BAFTA nominated series *Bratz Design Academy* is an excellent example of how this can be done.

Nicktoons will see us launch U.K. produced *Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids* in 2010 and we're currently in production on 26 brand new episodes exclusive to the channel. Short-form content is also important for Nicktoons, and we take feedback from our audience helping informing our decision to move to longform. *Purple and Brown* is a good example of this.

We're passionate about pre-school and invest enormously in U.K. produced content for Nick Jr. Our recent commissions *Humf* and *Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom* have brought both ratings success and critical acclaim.

We have the ability to operate on a local level and yet draw on our global expertise and mass in order to bring the very best in kids' entertainment to the UK audience.

We support various pro-social campaigns throughout the year including: *Nicktrition* which encourages our audience to make healthy lifestyle choices and we're working with Change for Life on this initiative. *Nick's Big Green Thing* highlights environmental issues in an accessible way and we've teamed up with Childline on our *See Something Say Something* campaign which focuses on the issue of bullying.

All submissions should be made via post to Nickelodeon Acquisitions, 15-18 Rathbone Place, London, W1T 1 HU.

Key Personnel

Debbie Macdonald – VP, Programming Director

Peter Drake – VP, Creative Director

Layla Lewis – Senior Programming Manager

Lynsey O'Callaghan – Senior Programming Executive