

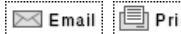
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### Ya just don't get it

#### Teenagers befuddle network execs in life and on TV

By Catherine Schetting -- *Broadcasting & Cable*, 3/5/2001

Network execs say the teen audience is a tough one. You don't need an expert to tell you that few adults really know what teens are thinking. And, for better or for worse, teens tend to want to watch adult programming. However, some networks have set their sights on the group with shows that are educational or just simply fun but without the titillating sex and violence found on most network prime time schedules.

PBS has been reaching out to teens with its series *In the Mix* for eight years. Producer David Beilinson says the award-winning documentary series, which features 12 new shows a year, reaches teens through other teens, without feeding viewers the adult perspective.

"Each show deals with a single theme ranging from sex to drugs to dating to college to careers," says Beilinson, who adds that the show has won everything from an Emmy to the prestigious Prism award, as well as plaudits from publications, including *The New York Times*.

"We have a new show about ecstasy, but it takes a new approach. We have teen reporters and producers reaching out to other teens, showing kids in rehab. After our shows air, they are offered to high schools, youth groups and non-profits as educational videos. It sounds like a cliché to say, but we give these kids a voice," says Beilinson.

Outside of *In the Mix*, PBS has found the teen audience more elusive. John F. Wilson, senior vice president, programming, East, says, beginning in April, the network will make a more concerted effort to provide something by, for and about teens.

"To be honest, I don't see it as 'going after' the teen market," he says. "It's a segment of the American population that we haven't focused on and that I feel is underserved with quality programming. Also, as you talk to older kids, you find they want to see themselves in a real, honest way. That's what *American High* is about—an honest depiction of life as a teen."

*American High* was originally produced by Fox, but it wasn't doing the business the network wanted, so PBS picked it up. Wilson says PBS will add new material to original episodes, add all new episodes and see how they all play. Additionally this fall, the network plans to air *Senior Year*, which has a similar approach

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and style.

And WAM! has its first teen-specific program block called TBIO (Teens by Invitation Only). TBIO is a Friday-night movie package, featuring the latest Hollywood hits aimed exclusively at teens. Titles like *She's All That* and *Ten Things I Hate About You* attract teen audiences and encourage them to watch programming on other networks.

Disney's afternoon Zoog block is targeted to 9- to 14-year-olds but does attract kids up to 17. Shows that also appeal to older teens include *The Famous Jett Jackson*, *The Jersey* and syndicated shows like *Boy Meets World*.

Cartoon Network realizes that its shows appeal to kids, teens and adults alike. However, the network primarily targets the 6-11 and 9-14 audience.

Nickelodeon reaches plenty of kids in the 9-14 block but doesn't have programming targeted to other teens. However, *The Amanda Show*, which airs on Saturday nights, garners teen attention. *All That* cast member and Nick comedienne Amanda Bynes is the star of this variety show. Another aspect of programming to teens is that they won't be teens for long. The goal for many programmers is to ingrain some viewing habits before they head into the 18-34 demo.

Of course, little on television obsesses teens the way MTV does. The network most heavily sells its older audience, 18-24, but attracts plenty of teen eyeballs, particularly to lifestyles of the rich rappers show, *MTV's Cribs*, and controversial stunt show *Jackass*. "TRL is a mecca for teens," says Harvey Ganot, MTV Networks executive vice president of ad sales, referring to afternoon hit *Total Request Live* and its adored host Carson Daly.

One of the reasons *TRL* is such a hit may well be that, because it reflects the musical tastes of today's teens, it can maintain a freshness that longer-form programs can't. "You really have to replenish your shows and speak to a new teen audience every three or four years," says Brad Turell, WB executive vice president of network communications. "And teens want to discover something that's their own."

Turell says that, while shows like *Dawson's Creek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* attract a teen audience, they also attract 18- to 34-year-olds, the network's core demo. "We have to come up with new shows like *Popular* or *Sabrina*, things that bring in new teens. You really have to always be cultivating them. And you want to market to people as young as you can so they become loyal to your brand for the rest of their lives."



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