

Notes from Channel 4 Session at the VLV Spring Conference 2021

Speaker: Alex Mahon, CEO, Channel 4

Chair: Lord Michael Grade

- 2020 was hard financially and logistically but Channel 4 did well during the lockdown. Young audiences especially increased a lot.
- Channel 4 broadcast news and extra documentaries to help people through lockdown. For example, Grayson Perry reached large audiences through art.
- Ratings went up as programmes reflected the way the nation felt.
- British people love PSB content and no more than in this crisis and Channel 4 was nimble in response which meant their creative process helped.
- Revenue is recovering in advertising in 2021.
- The remit debate has not gone away and is as strong as ever: Diversity, creative innovation, bringing in new talent, challenging for a purpose are key remits for Channel 4. The soft spot in terms of the remit is where the remit and popularity coincide – the best example of this recently was *It's a Sin*.
- Online business cannot fill gaps in our culture and the SVODS will not do that. PSB looks at culture/programmes from the inside-out and SVODs look at it from the outside-in. Example: *Gogglebox* v *Tiger King*. It is obvious that *Gogglebox* presents people like us and is made in Britain for Britain. *Tiger King* isn't.
- The question facing the PSBs is how fast can you switch to digital? Channel 4 is almost at 50/50. They monetise that through All4. 20% of Channel 4 revenues are digital. They are ahead of their peer set of broadcasters.
- Decline in linear will continue. Consumers want to watch how and when they want. Linear is important as a marketing window. It is a constant balancing act between linear and digital.
- Regulation is key...Channel 4 wants to remain a PSB. They are not supported by regulation online. They need **prominence online**. They need to update the EPG. Legislation must say that PSBs must be on first page in top ten on all devices. If people can't find PSB, there is a real risk for society...especially for young people. Manufacturers must not be gatekeepers (Samsung, Google, LG etc).
- There are immense social media bubbles, immense polarisation and PSB brings us together so it is very important.
- The terms of trade need to be tweaked with producers. We should build the creative industries but Channel 4 needs more VOD rights and more rights they can exploit online. They don't want to own all the rights. They are different from SVODs who keep all rights. They recognise that we have to build up Britain. 3000 indie sector jobs are supported by Channel 4.
- Switch to digital and representing the UK better are Channel 4's two main tasks. They are more about diversity of representation and of thought across the UK. There is a big chance to carry wider opinion in broadcasting. 250 jobs outside London & they will be opening their Leeds office soon.