

## **KADHAMBARI CHINTAMANI'S VIEWS ON UNDERSTANDING TV**

***Some business shows that IN TV has produced are...***

Basically there are three kind of programmes and business shows that IN TV produces. One is a daily business show known as *Business Breakfast*, the other is an economic debate show called *Cross Fire* and the third is *India Business Week* that is a weekly business show. With India Business Week we are for the first time attempting to package information in an entertaining way (and not the usual stiff lipped, jargon-filled business shows).

***The importance of breaking down an idea into simple concepts on television...***

In all the years we have been producing business shows, there is one thing I have learnt and learnt well, I hope. It is of no interest to anybody if the programme uses heavy jargon and does not have the ability to break down an idea into simple concepts. The audience prefers simple English, rather than the use of financial buzzwords even in a business programme.

***Communicate effectively to your audiences by dejargonising information....***

A lot of the problems with the pink papers partially lies in the use of big words which most people do not understand. With the corporatisation of India, more and more people are reading the pink papers and watching business shows to get an idea on what's happening in the corporate sector. It is critical not just for television producers and journalists to be able to dejargonise but also for corporations and corporate communicators who have the news and information to communicate. Whether you are a guest on the show or you send a fax, it is critical to break those concepts down into simple ideas so that these may be communicated back to the audiences clearly.

***On television be brief and concise....***

An understanding of the nature of the programme and the subject is required to not only break that down into simple ideas but also condense those key points to be delivered in a very limited time frame. In a magazine or a newspaper, you have the option to write an article consisting of 500 or 1000 words. On television you are not going to have a story that is more than 3 or 4 minutes long. When watching television, the audience has the tendency to switch channels or tune-off if the person is repetitive or makes a lengthy speech. Therefore, it makes sense to be punchy, brief and concise and to get in the key points as quickly as possible. Therefore while on TV, be brief and don't be repetitive. The art is to learn to communicate the most important things in the shortest possible time.

***Communicate*** Very often the same people are featured repeatedly on

***about new faces within your company...***

the same shows. It would be very nice to have new faces for us as well. Do acquaint media with the people who are important in your organisation, and they don't just have to be CEOs. These people from senior management could be doing a great job or may have an idea that they feel most comfortable talking about.

## **QUESTION & ANSWER**

***How do you address the issue of clarifications on television?***

Ms. Chintamani: In my years of experience, something like that has never happened on any of my shows and I don't think that something like that has happened at Star News as well. So I don't have an example to illustrate. However, it is very difficult to turn around and make an apology for a story that was aired yesterday or four hours ago or last week. But if there has been some error, and it is brought to the notice of the producer, the point would be well taken. An effort would be made not only formally to write back to the company but also to make sure that something like that did not happen again. One must also understand that on air it is very difficult to make an apology to one particular incident on a particular programme, which dates back some time. I don't think we can afford to be irresponsible about it.

Ms. Chintamani added that for the most part you have the interviewee on camera and therefore it is hard for you to misquote them.

***Sometimes editing of bytes can convey a meaning that may be totally placed out of context.***

Ms. Chintamani: Those things used to happen in the past. Television is a relatively young medium and I think television journalists both in the political arena and in business journalism are slowly coming of age. Our credibility is at stake and if a producer is doing a story and misquoting you to make the programme punchy or to make it useful in their context, then they are not going to be able to come back to you. The television fraternity has learnt many a thing on the job and such mistakes do not happen any more.

***On how a programme is made and what is the system followed...***

Ms. Chintamani: If you were to look at a programme like India Business Week, it is similar to a newspaper in the sense that there are four or five sections in the programme. Whether it is the headlines or it is the special guest of the week or a lead story on a subject that is burning and alive or a consumer story or the market section. A viewer would clearly know what to expect from a programme. He or she may not necessarily know what stories are going to be carried the following week, but one has a fair idea. It is like looking at a newspaper - you have a front page, a back page, an editorial page, a sports

page and so on.

We also go about collecting and editing news in pretty much the same way that the print media does. We have correspondents who are assigned beats and who cover specific sections. We have regular edit meetings where we take decisions on the stories to follow up and whom to contact for those stories. The information (or an idea for a lead story) is either available to us via newspapers or is available to the journalists who are in touch with corporate communicators or PR companies or from someone who has called to share some information. So it could work in any of these ways.

***What is the basis of the selection of your guest?***

Ms. Chintamani: Unlike Star News or other 24-hour channels, we do not have a 24-hour business channel on air yet. We have a few business programmes and so we need to take a close look at the shows and determine how to differentiate them from one another. The treatment of two shows can be very different. Based on that, it should not be difficult for you to suggest the panelist or even the co-panelist you may have in mind.

***Is there a mechanism by which we can tabulate the audiences switching onto a programme.***

Ms. Chintamani: There are some demographics of audiences available with advertising companies. But these are however limited to the metros. Most of the letters I receive are from mini metros, small towns and isolated areas, people who are often not reflected through the TRPs. And this may be a critical audience as well. So it is very difficult to say that this is the exact number of people of this particular profile who watch my programme at this time.

***Very often anchors come across as fairly passionate in their programmes on burning issues. However the anchor does have a responsibility to present a balanced view and present both sides of the story. Comment***

Ms. Chintamani: At the end of the day, we are dealing with humans. There will be anchors with biases, which become apparent on air as well. You can only try to appear balanced.

***Sometimes a brief given to us by a journalist may not present the complete picture. And at the end of it the story emerges with a completely different focus.***  
***Comment.***

Ms. Chintamani: Most programmes do not carry company specific stories. Even if a company story has been done, it is because the business environment at the moment demands that an issue be taken up that relates to certain companies or players in that sector. If I was to take up the example of Coke and Pepsi, then clearly I would do a story that not only has the perspective of the two companies in question but also responses from other players in the sector. When a correspondent comes to you to ask for a response or an interview, you then can get an idea from the journalist on what the story is attempting to do. You have the right to ask that information.

Very often the story actually comes together once the interviews are completed. And quite often the story may look very different after it has been edited keeping the 'bytes' in mind.

It is partly also a matter of training the interviewer. It is very difficult for a correspondent to shoot an interview for just about 1 minute. The interview stretches on and it seems such a waste when in reality all we are going to use is just about 30 seconds of the interview. And it is not as if the producer is going to archive it and use it for something else. So in most cases it would be so much more useful if the correspondent was able to logically explain that all he really needs is just about 4 minutes of your time and none of us would be any the worse for it.

*(Excerpted from the presentation made by Kadhambari Chintamani, Executive Producer, IN TV, at PR Pundit's workshop – Your Practical Interface With Media, held in New Delhi on August 24, 1999)*