

section three

who will be the winners in 2014?

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Let me check my diary

Peter Bazalgette



Let me check my diary...
 A day in the life of a top
 independent. But why
 is he living in Manchester?
 And why does he want
 all his staff to sleep in the
 afternoons?

9am Up early today to meet some lobbyists. The broadcasters are intent on getting a quota forcing the UK's three big producers to give them each a percentage of their best shows. It's an unwarranted attack on the immense but justified power of the major production studios in Britain. We worked hard for our billion-pound turnovers. As most of television is now centred in Manchester, we have breakfast in the trendy canal-side area of Manchester, which means having a gay breakfast - egg white-only omelettes and pink grapefruit. (As Manchester is the new London, there's now a whole new regional policy: 30 per cent of programmes have to be made outside the Manchester/Liverpool conurbation).

The broadcasters are saying we're screwing the marketplace and we're too dominant and we've got a handle on all the talent, both behind and in front of the camera, and that it's quite unfair. Furthermore, we've forced them to reorganise the whole electronic programme guide, so that you can only access programmes via the name of the programme, the talent in the programme, but not via the channel. Nobody knows the channel names anymore anyway. With me at breakfast is the largest independent producer, Granada. When Abramovitch bought ITV he flogged the programme-making bit. More fool him.

11am A production meeting about the making of *Big Brother 15*. The problem with *Big Brother* is that it's now firmly in the category of NRP - that is, Nostalgia Reality Programming, much beloved of people in their fifties and sixties. Kids in their teens are saying, why can't we get that rubbish off-air? What is it those old people like about it? The average age of the people in the *Big Brother* house is now 72. And they're still taking their clothes off. Which is a bit of a problem in itself.

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BB is still being made for Channel 4, although it has its own 24-hour digital channel as well. And Channel 4, the channel we were all told was going to be marginalised, is now the major commercial network. The desirability of focusing on specific demographics, which Channel 4 has always done, proved to be the winning business model for commercial channels. Those that tried to appeal to a general audience - BBC ONE, ITV - were screwed long ago.

Channel 4 eventually did a 100-year deal with us because there weren't many other television shows ever invented that essentially converged the media and got people using the telephone, Web and TV all at the same time, creating multiple revenue streams. And so *BB* turned out to be the exception rather than the rule and its value grew over time. Of course the fact that it appeals to this older demographic helps because they're the ones with the money. It's sponsored by Sennakot in collaboration with the London Hernia Centre. Sir Kevin Lygo, who inherited his knighthood, now identifies closely with the sponsors.

1pm At lunchtime we have a teleconference with the different parts of our worldwide organisation. It's a set lunch. We insist everyone eats the same dish across the world, which on this occasion consists of some noodly things from Waggamama, the international chain. We encourage drinking at lunchtime because it aids the afternoon siesta, which is also company policy.

We're like the education department of France. Back in the 20th century they said the French education minister could look at his watch and say 'It's now 11 o'clock - everybody in France aged ten is studying Latin.' That's how we run our company.

4pm After the siesta we have our annual negotiation with advertisers - we sell the ads now, not the broadcasters. We've also gone one beyond product-placement. We have mostly replaced the old system of commercials between programmes with subliminal messages in programmes which are done via flash frames and by subtle, motivational wording of scripts that make you want to buy products. Far from objecting to this form of mind control, TV audiences actually prefer it. It's so much simpler to buy consumer durables under hypnosis. Supermarkets used to have 2,000 different items but now have up to 80,000. We have an annual negotiation and then tell the broadcasters which ads will be delivered packaged with our shows. We cut them in on the revenues - which is more than they used to do for us.

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6pm Final meeting of the day - about reviving popular but long forgotten formats. The BBC's Charter has been amended to oblige the Corporation to produce more cynical and derivative programming. The BBC is now available by subscription only and nobody's subscribing to it - it's just not popular enough. What they need is more cynical and derivative programming.

7pm Time to read the media papers before retiring for the evening. His eminence, Conor Dignam (now a bishop in the Church of England), is still editing *Broadcast* magazine, which he has merged with the *Church Times*. The voice of the moral majority is so reassuring. There's a reverential profile of Michael Grade, now the BBC's President-for-Life. There's scheduling news as well - since they decided to take Sky One upmarket it proved a powerful force in persuading octogenarians to subscribe to digital. This enabled analogue switch-off and a grateful nation voted Barry Cox a personal rickshaw in perpetuity.

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8pm Off home to watch a live cabinet meeting from Downing Street. Ministers have a debate and then we vote on the proposal and get an instant result. Live programming is very, very important because it's the last thing broadcasters have where people really do watch old-style linear ads scheduled between the programmes. They want to see something happen in real time, whether it's a football cup final or even a reality show. Later there'll be the live evening celebrations for William V's coronation. Such events have become very highly prized, the 2014 equivalent of the Roman arena. Not to be confused, of course, with Alan Yentob's *Arena*, the arts strand, coming soon to Sky One.