

MEDIA TASK FORCE: BACKGROUND ON TELEVISION CO-PRODUCTION PROGRAMMING

Two-country co-productions in television programming are scarce. Major obstacles to such programs include the physical and technical problems of linking two or more production bases, and agreeing on editorial responsibility for the content of the program.

One successful model for such a program is found in a weekly current events show, "Asia Now," a co-production of KCTS TV in Seattle, Hawaii Public Television and NHK in Tokyo.

"Asia Now" is currently the only English-language weekly news series that covers Asia and the Pacific. Programming emphasizes late-breaking news and major developments in Asia with additional reports and features from a Pacific Bureau in Honolulu. Also, public television stations across the country contribute stories focusing on U.S. and Asian relations, as well as policies and attitudes affecting Asia. Satellite links between Japan, North America and Honolulu ensure up-to-date reporting and communication among the co-producers.

Each week "Asia Now," carried by 59 U.S. public television stations, is available to more than 27 million viewers across the United States. The greatest U.S. viewing audience for "Asia Week" is in Hawaii, which is greatly affected by Asian economics and culture. In the contiguous 48 states, viewing audience is concentrated on the east and west coasts, with little coverage in the south and midwest. The program has wide appeal to those interested in or involved in U.S.-Asian relations, business, politics, culture, education, and the media.

Funding for "Asia Now" is provided by NHK, KCTS, Hawaii Public Television, University of Hawaii, the State of Hawaii and the Bank of Hawaii and Japan Air Lines. The yearly budget is roughly \$5 million, although this does not include in-kind contributions from NHK, such as use of their facilities.

According to Bernard Clark, President and CEO of KCTS, the biggest difficulty in setting up a co-production with NHK was striking a balance in production and editorial responsibilities. The negotiations in this area required several years. The current arrangement is that the program is filmed and produced using NHK facilities in Tokyo. NHK is responsible for hiring the Japanese anchor of the show; KCTS hires the staff and co-anchor. Each organization has editorial control over material aired in its country. This means, in principle, that two versions of the same show could be aired simultaneously in Japan and the U.S., although this has yet to happen.

Mr. Clark emphasizes that the arrangement for parallel editorial control is the key to "Asia Now" success. Other programs with similar formats and objectives have failed to attract an interested audience in U.S. markets because of a perception that Japanese editorial control translates into propaganda programming.

Although setting up a co-production was a long and difficult task, Mr. Clark feels there is still a great deal of potential in this format for satisfying the tremendous curiosity the American public has demonstrated concerning Asia and Japan in particular.