

Tuning in to Religious and Faith-Based Networks

Christian nets predominate, but they are not the only ones in family-friendly territory

By Michael A. Kashmer ■ *Broadband Properties*

This month we will be taking a look at 21 religious and faith-based networks that are available on cable and satellite. This category has grown beyond the early Christian networks in the last few years. It now includes Spanish language, Muslim-American and Jewish programming options.

Mainstream television as well as the movie business has taken a liking to faith-themed shows. Although primarily Christian themed material has been around for some time (like some Spencer Tracy films and Bing Crosby musicals from the 1940's), there have been a number of recent examples like Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," NBC's "Revelations" and Dan Brown's novel, soon to be a feature film, "The DaVinci Code." Spirituality and its exploration in the media are sometimes presented as a new discovery. Thus, these controversial shows seem to garner more than their share of press coverage.

Marketing of family-friendly shows has recently become an important element to producers and networks. Networks like History Channel, The Learning Channel and National Geographic have had compelling in-depth looks at the early Church, re-enactments of what it must have been like to live back in those times and feature shows about the lasting impact of Christian art. Archeology shows with a religious twist abound.

Joint ventures between Christian

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production companies and mainstream broadcast and cable networks are becoming more common. It is my guess, as these programs are critically acclaimed and commercially successful, more productions like these will find their way to our television screens.

The Family-Friendly Forum

The Family Friendly Forum participates in the development process at networks that increase the number of "family-friendly" programs. The forum includes advertisers who help support programs that typically air during prime time between 8 and 10 PM.

Networks are quick to point out that this "family friendly" term is a lot broader than you might first think. Their lineups also will surely feature programs that might be considered a bit more controversial. It makes it easier for a program to move through the development cycle if it deals responsibly with moral issues. The goal here is to encourage development of

scripts by providing starter money for what is called "good quality TV," and that means making it a commercial success.

The programming the Forum wants is uplifting but minimizes violence and sex. The shows should also depict true-to-life problems and issues. Cable nets like ABC Family Channel, Hallmark and Disney want to attract viewers who want to see "safe" programs that everyone in their family can watch at certain times of the day.

There are now also Christian marketing consulting firms that will "measure" the religious quotient in shows and provide marketing savvy about how to reach primarily Christian audiences. They are adept at pointing out words or situations that might offend. They also make recommendations to the script or stage set that would be attractive to a Christian audience. One example would be to hang a crucifix on the rear view mirror of a car. Many people wouldn't even notice. But to those that do, a certain implied signal is conveyed.

Hollywood's Role

Fundamental and evangelical Christians number about 30 million in the US and Hollywood is paying attention to tapping into this most powerful and focused niche market.

With an incredible "grass roots" organization, positive word-of-mouth can make the difference between making money on a feature film and suffering a loss. This is especially true as box office receipts fall and profit margins shrink.

Here is an alphabetical list of the primary religious programming networks available to you. Check out their websites or give them a call for

further information. I would recommend that you check your competitors' lineups to see what religious networks they offer.

Is your service area heavily evangelical Christian? Can you offer more of this kind of programming that will differentiate your lineup from your competitors? Networks can provide demographics and help you to choose programming that makes the most sense in your area.

Don't forget powerful "grass roots" marketing, which is easier than you think to tap into. The networks already do an excellent job of grass roots marketing and would love to help out.

Adding your service area to their website and including your company in their publicity is a quick way to get the ball rolling. And be sure to ask about Premium services and video on demand, which can help add to your bottom line. **BBP**

About the Author

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Religious and Faith-Based Networks - Contact Information				
Network	Distribution	Programming	Website	Phone
Bridges TV	Digital cable and satellite	Premium net - SRP \$14.99 a month. News, movies, lifestyle for Muslim-Americans	www.bridgestv.com	716-578-1317
BYU Television	24 million digital cable homes	Alumni and friends of Brigham Young University and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Sports, lectures, documentaries and music	www.byutv.org	866-662-9888
The Church Channel (a TBN Network)	11 million digital cable homes	Interdenominational church services 24/7	www.churchchannel.tv	972-313-9500
Daystar TV	45 million homes via satellite and cable	Shows "Celebration", "joni" live events	www.daystartv.com	866-455-4900
Eternal Word Television Network	50 million homes via satellite and cable	Catholic talk shows, news magazines	www.ewtn.com	205-271-2900
EWTN Espanol	10 million digital cable homes	Hispanic Catholic programming	www.ewtn.com/spanish	205-271-2900
Family Net Television	30 million broadcast and cable homes	Southern Baptist family-friendly fare	www.familynet.com	800-832-6638
Golden Eagle Broadcasting	Tulsa broadcast station, cable and C-band	Contemporary Protestant programming; Oral Roberts Ministries	www.golden-eagle-tv.com	918-495-7288
God TV	73 million homes worldwide	Young Christian, some UK satellite feeds	www.godtv.com	202-223-4023
Gospel Music Television Network	Digital cable and satellite	Southern gospel, Christian country music	www.gmtn.com	615-650-2433

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Network	Distribution	Programming	Website	Phone
I-Life TV	7 million digital cable homes	Inspirational lifestyle, news, life enrichment, movies, some Spanish language	www.inspnets.com	704-525-9800
INSP - The Inspiration Network	22 million digital cable homes	Interdenominational, Saturday night inspirational shows, music, series, minority and children's programming	www.inspnets.com	704-525-9800
JCTV (a TBN Network)	2 million digital cable homes	Faith based music videos, talk shows, teen issues, targets 13-29 year olds, extreme music and sports	www.jc-tv.net	972-313-9500
La Familia Network	300,000 digital cable homes	Hispanic talk shows, music, movies, children's programs	www.inspnets.com	704-525-9800
Shalom TV	Premium VOD format monthly subscription	Jewish-American programming. Films, lifestyle, news, educational	www.shalomtv.org	724-816-7301
Trinity Broadcasting Network	52 million cable and satellite homes	Variety shows news, music, movies and original productions	www.tbnnetworks.com	972-313-9500
TBN Enlace USA (a TBN Network)	1 million digital cable homes	Spanish language church services, music, talk shows, children's programming	www.tbn.org	972-313-9500
Three Angels Broadcasting Network	Cable distribution	Interdenominational guidance themed programs, cooking shows	www.3abn.org	618-627-2971
Total Christian Television	30 million digital cable homes in the US and Canada	Documentaries, films, music and children's programs	www.tct.tv	618-997-9333
The Word Network	36 million digital cable homes	Urban ministry	www.thewordnetwork.com	248-357-4566
World Harvest TV	13 million cable and DirecTV homes	Christian programs, sports, family shows, "Lassie" and "The Lone Ranger" reruns	www.lesea.com	574-291-8200