

## FUNCTIONS AND TASKS OF PROGRAM MANAGEMENT IN MEDIA COMPANIES

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Review Paper

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**The paper analyzes the position, functions and tasks of program management in media companies. Given the fact that programming media offer, as part of strategic planning, is the most important element in attracting and retaining audiences and advertisers, program management occupies one of the most important positions in modern media companies, both commercial and public. Depending on the size and organizational structure of media company, the program management constitutes a separate business unit, which, in addition to the program director, also employs a range of media experts responsible for selecting and evaluating quality of media content, researching needs and habits of media audiences, evaluating the broadcast contents, and continuous monitoring of the work of competing companies.**

**Keywords:** Media management, Program management, Programming, Media product, TV.

### INTRODUCTION

In addition to traditional managerial functions related to planning, organizing, leading and controlling the work process, the management of the media company should be also focused on: a) consumers, without which it is impossible to create economic values; b) intermediaries who are responsible for consumer relations and who have an increasingly important role in the development of digital economy; c) creative producers of media contents; d) providers of telecommunications infrastructure who provide technical support of the realization of media-communication process.

Based on the organizational structure of media companies, one can distinguish: program or editorial management, technical management (management of physical media resources), business management, financial management, human resource management, management of marketing promotion and PR activity, and management of general affairs (Miletić, 2009).

This paper is focused on analyzing the functioning of program management, i.e. management of creating media contents, which decides on their selection, design and realization. In fact, it is about programming the media offer, both in terms of types of media content (news, entertainment, education) and in their schedule. Programming is the key instrument for attracting the audience, which also determines the sustainability of media company (Obono & Madu, 2010).

Program management has a significant role also in the long-term process of development of media company as a brand and its expansion on the market. This amenable and complex role is loaded with various problems, primarily those related to trends in the overall media field, such as:

- a) intensified competition, both in terms of constant program and technology related innovations, and the struggle for the attention of the audience;
- b) higher requirements in the methodology of surveying the audience, given its increasing fragmentation. This presumes sophisticated methods in surveying and understanding all

segments of the audience, their preferences, habits and propensities. It is not enough for the program management to have standard socio-demographic data on the audience; it also needs information about the lifestyle, volume of consumption, ways of doing the payment when purchasing, psychological characteristics, time budget, as well as future needs, expectations and attitudes;

- c) continuous increase in the price of programming;
- d) shorter life expectancy of media products (Küng, 2007; Fink, 1986).

In addition to these issues, programming the media content is often accompanied by adapting to the editorial orientation (ideology), which is subject to changes in cases of change in the ownership or political changes, to which the public media are particularly sensitive. Also, there is a certain degree of state influence on the media exercised through a variety of mechanisms of hidden control – "soft censorship" (according to a report by *The Open Society Justice Initiative* [December 2005: 3], the term "soft censorship" includes various measures and actions undertaken by the state aimed at controlling the media; these are the abuse of public funds and monopolies, abuse of regulatory and inspection powers and extra-legal pressures), or by the ways of regulating this area. In 2014 the Republic of Serbia has adopted a set of media laws and regulations relating to the principles of public broadcasting and the work of media companies, the operation of public service media, cross-border television, the operation of news agencies in state ownership, ways of privatization of local and regional radio and television stations, and the like. These laws should contribute to the consolidation of the media market, the establishment of a sustainable media "system", and making the ownership structure "transparent". In addition, the multiplatform environment, or the multimedia context which changes the communication landscape (Hearn et al., 1998) generates a new kind of communication and demands changes to be introduced in the ways media content is designed and placed.

## **POSITION OF THE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATION OF MEDIA COMPANIES**

Media companies are mainly organized based on a typical top-down model of pyramidal type. It consists of relatively autonomous organizational units, for example: radio and television and their organizational units, as well as management units, such as top management and management of each business unit with the accompanying administration. Each sector has its own facilities, production and human resources which are usually strictly related to the given organizational unit (Ratković Njegovan & Šidanin, 2014).

The example of the organization of Radio Television of Serbia (see Figure 1) as a structurally complex media company with dispersed and heterogeneous structure illustrates the position and importance of the function of program management in media company. The program director, who manages the business unit of TV program, belongs to the strategic level of management, and occupies one of the leading positions. The line of strategic management is related to the vertical level of communication which is realized by the general director, the director of the television, and the program director. The horizontal level of communication is realized between the program director, the director of production, and the director of television technique. If necessary, this process also includes the managers of other services, which points to the expansion of communication to the lower, coordination level.

The figure shows that the position of program management in the context of the management structure of the media company is one of the key positions in the process of decision-making and strategic planning. According to Miletić (2009), program management can also be seen as the creative communication centre of the media company, as the stronghold of trust which lies in creativity, analytical skills, knowledge of markets, media technologies and the needs of the audience. This assumes that the assessments of program management is relied by the sector's other executives.

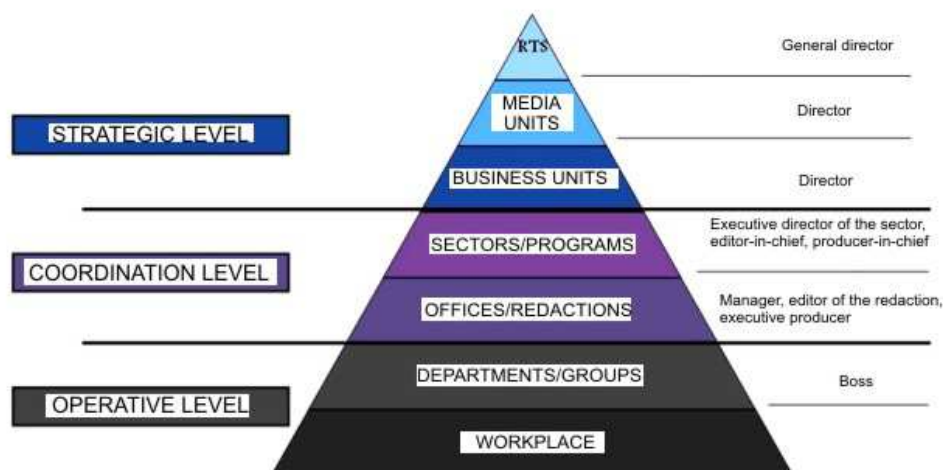


Figure 1: Management structure of the Radio Television of Serbia

In this sense Albarran (2010) lists several basic activities for which the program management is responsible. The basic activity is planning the media contents, which takes place in consultation with other managers and corporate leaders, and should be in line with the strategic goals of the company. In planning, the traditional media uses different strategies, which are mainly based on the model of offering programs that will attract both audiences and advertisers. Planning becomes less important when the content is made available on the Internet and other platforms, where it is unnecessary to follow the single line planning.

This is followed by the activities of creating and administering the budget, keeping in mind the fact that programming is a major expense in the media company, as well as by program acquisition, which comes from several sources: from internal production, from the network or other production company, or is purchased or exchanged.

Finally, after the realization of media content, the program is evaluated, where the program management uses the data obtained from surveying the audience, as well as the information from the social media. The process of evaluation enables to make decisions about changing the format, adjusting the broadcasting schedule, or the abolition of a specific program.

In addition to the above activities, program management should also be involved in monitoring the sustainability of the given media product. Specifically, there is a tendency towards accelerating maturation of traditional media product and decline of their lifetime. Factors affecting the lifetime of media products include the

needs and desires of consumers, technological changes, activities of competition, and company's marketing activities. In the present multimedia context, which is marked by the fragmentation of the media and the audience, the content is changing increasingly, the demand for it is unstable, and the attention of the audience is reduced. Therefore, the tasks of program management is to contribute to the successful operation of their companies and maintain good communication with the audience through the right choice of media contents, developing and diversifying the portfolio of its offer, and providing adequate program scheme.

## MANAGING MEDIA PRODUCTS

### Media products

Media product represents a media content which is created using audio-visual effects, driven by human creativity and innovation, and with the help of available technical and technological resources in the course of production process which incorporates intellectual, financial, organizational, technological and human values (Ratković Njegovan & Šidanin, 2011). A media product includes a set of tangible and intangible assets, including social, psychological and functional benefits and satisfaction. As such, media product represents the basic product of media company and the "instrument of work" of program management. A series of media products, carefully selected and meaningfully scheduled on a daily basis makes the so called television program. The television program, designed, planned, organized and designed in advance, is an endless column of shows, a miraculous and a continuous line, which

follows its usual path – day by day (Đurđević, 2010).

The television program consists of live broadcasts (news bulletins and talk shows, sports events, international events of global significance, etc.), recorded programs (grouped by genre, including propaganda videos), movies and teletext (summarized structure of TV program). TV program implies broadcasting a specific content broadcast in a continuous process – year after year, week after week, day after day, based on a defined schedule and with continuity. It consists of a row of media products the production of which is affected by four components: competition, the size of the audience, the interest of advertisers and sponsors, and prices of corresponding programs (Turow, 2011).

Planning the program and harmonizing the time of broadcasting the media contents classified by genres with the habits and needs of the audience is one of the phases in the process of managing media products. Genres are applied forms and types of media contents. These are the main categories of media contents, and they include news, entertainment, information, education and advertising. The development of program genres and subgenres and their broadcasting in certain parts of the day depends on the structure and availability of audience in these intervals. Program management has a duty to make the best combination of genres that will be broadcast on television with the goal to meet to the needs of the widest audience. This leads to the creation of new forms of genres by combining the existing ones.

There are four basic sources of the TV program: network, syndicated, local and online programs (Eastman & Ferguson, 2013). The television program is adjusted to the daily, weekly and seasonal preferences of viewers, according to which each television company creates its own program scheme. In the words of Bob Berstou (2003), the program director of the British Independent Television, the program scheme of broadcasting the program produced or purchased by a TV station produced is the hourly schedule for which its creator believes that appeals the most to the viewers. In practice, it is the Bible of any TV station and an important tool for all employees.

### **Planning the program scheme**

The program scheme can be planned on a daily, weekly and seasonal basis (Turković, 2005). Of

course, certain deviations from the planned and predefined program schemes are possible, primarily as a result of unforeseen events affecting the entire public to which the television should adapt the broadcast of its programs (holidays, specific events such as a day of mourning, global sports events, etc.). The daily program scheme contains five different types of programs: morning – from 6 to 10; mid-day – from 10 to 16; afternoon – from 16 to 19; evening, known as the "prime time" – from 19 to 23; and night – after 23. However, today's program managers increase the segmentation, making these time intervals even shorter. This is due to the needs caused by the changing ways of following television program and the development of technology, which inevitably leads to crucial deviations in the process of meeting the needs and habits of the audience. Thus, the program scheme is increasingly adjusted to the everyday, average demands of population of an area or the same group of those interested.

The flow of audience also determines the "prime time" – the exclusive evening time in which the most important programs that provide the largest number of viewers are broadcasted. Audience retention (lead-in) is a term used to indicate the mode of continuous broadcast of the same type of shows, where viewers become attached to a certain media content. The term stripped scheduling is also in use in defining a long-term program scheme. It is the process of broadcasting the same show every day at the same time, starting the broadcast on a half or full hour basis. A good example of this is the show of the First Serbian Television – *Evening with Ivan Ivanović*, which is broadcast every Friday at 9 p.m., or the Turkish series, which are broadcast every weekday in 8 p.m. The First Serbian Television does not deviate from the announced and planned time intervals, which is not the case with the second most watched commercial television – TV Pink, which fails to deliver the similar contents in the announced time. Shows of similar type have no constant terms of broadcasting, but are subject to changes depending on the rest of the program, whose time of broadcast is often prolonged or shortened under the pressure of current events. The time scheduled for broadcasting primetime news on TV Pink is often extended for several minutes, which further reflects on the rest of the program scheme. Thus, for example, the Turkish series announced for 8 p.m. is broadcasted with a short delay, while the competitive show of this television – the *Amidzi show* – often starts with a delay of more than an hour. This situation allows

viewers of the First Serbian Television to become its permanent audience, as here, the announced media contents are emitted precisely in the designated period, respecting thereby the time of viewers. In contrast, the TV Pink is constantly on the see-saw between the possibility that certain media content loses its viewers due to delay in broadcasting and switching TV channel (distracted by the content of the competition), and the possibility of attracting new viewers or retaining existing ones, who followed the previously broadcasted content.

## PROGRAMMING THE MEDIA OFFERS

According to Ellis (2000), programming the media offers is the last creative act in television and represents the basic choice that defines the programmatic orientation of media company. It is based on several criteria, such as: compliance and compatibility, i.e. adjusting the program scheme to the time budget of the media audience, creating habits in terms to following certain contents, fluctuation of the audience, constancy in the process of broadcasting instead of maintaining the program and reaching a wide audience. Three are a variety of strategies used in programming, such as: programming the shows by dividing the day into time slots (dayparting); bridging – preventing viewers from switching to other channels; counterprogramming – distracting viewers from competing stations; theming – broadcasting special programs; stripping – broadcasting shows on a daily or weekly basis; stacking – broadcasting similar shows one after another; crossprogramming – connecting two shows, etc. The programming strategies are usually combined, but the certainty of outcome in terms of the size of the audience and satisfaction with the program is difficult to predict. Because of this, programming is a skill and an art. It can be concluded that the processes of selecting, scheduling, promoting, evaluating program define the work of the programmer (Eastman & Ferguson, 2013).

The television audience/public primarily expects of the program to be suited to their preferences, which also includes the ability to choose. In this context, preferences are related to the affection of the media audience/public, their habits, needs and desires in terms of favouring specific media contents or programs (channels). Also, the attitude towards media contents depends on the individual's cognitive abilities, his/her previous experience with the media, ability of visual processing the messages, beliefs, expectations and attitudes,

which are usually under the influence of a given culture. And third, the data on the structure and dynamics of everyday life of the population are very important for program orientation, given the daily activities of viewers which are considered according to the schedule, dynamics and the total time spent, and present a contextual framework and condition for monitoring free time. The model of time budget is used in studies of the temporal dimension of human activities. It serves to examine the schedule of the population's activities based to the daily time use. The data refer to one (dominant) activity carried out in a time span of 24 hours split into 15 minute intervals, which excludes all other activities except following the radio and TV program. Therefore, the prediction of the pattern of behaviour of the audience is one of the most important and most complex tasks of program management, since it is difficult to predict how the viewer will behave in the future.

First of all, the TV program should be entertaining, topical, interesting and creative, and particularly picturesque, that is adjusted to the iconic expression of the medium (Thomas, 2009). Therefore, one can say that programming the TV content is both a pragmatic skill to attract the audience and advertisers, and art contained in a number of creative activities in the development of media content (however, Angsten [Angsten, 2006] opposes the thesis of the artistic dimension of the media product, stating that the TV show is not a work of art, but communication).

Experimenting in terms of new program formats, while monitoring the behavioural patterns of the fragmented audience, represents one track of programming. In the broad sense, the formal implies the formal structure and patterns of the show, while the specific content is not important. In a narrow sense, it implies the set of all elements that are typical for a TV show, which should be subject to trade (Rook, 2009). Formatting refers to organization of the overall program offer, the content, form and creativity related characteristics of content lines, as well as the content, form and creative characteristics of individual media products. Formats are also often used as marketing tools; they are constantly changing and being adapted to the needs of the media market. Licensed TV formats are among the most watched show because they make good marketing formulas for media management, which ensures the presence of the audience and advertisers. For example, from humble origins in the 1950<sup>s</sup>, the global TV format industry has become a €3.1 billion-a-year global

trade (Chalaby, 2011). Between 2006 and 2008, the FRAPA survey (2011: 3) revealed that the total global production expenditure on formats stood at around €9.3bn. The use of licensed formats helps to avoid the risk of costly domestic projects, and thus reduces costs. Today, there are many independent distributors of television content whose task is to assist the local media in finding adequate contents which will make their programs more attractive. Turow (2011) calls this kind of work unionization, under which he means licensing programs to individual stations on individual markets.

The second, auxiliary track of programming is orientation towards quality and authenticity, which is recognizable in respect of creative ambition and high editorial standards in terms of its cognitive, emotional and production value. The quality content, regardless of whether the quality relates to its production (technical), social or subjective value, or even popularity, is an essential element of attraction and the most important element of credibility of a program.

Managing the quality of media content is limited, given the fact that the creation of these contents is a creative process which is difficult to standardize. Media companies are in constant search for new, authentic, exclusive, unusual and creative program formats. In contrast, the public perceives the media messages differently: assesses their quality and reliability, senses authenticity and novelty, understands the symbolism, experiences the spirituality, social and historical values, and succumbs to influence. For now, the innovative trends in the creation of audio-visual products for a wide audience in terms of content-related innovation are much slower than technological innovations. Therefore, the global media offer contains many similar or identical contents, which are only adapted to the national media market.

#### **ANALYZING THE PROGRAM AND MONITORING COMPETITION**

In line with the strategic decisions made in media company the task of the program management is to evaluate broadcasted program on a continuous basis. The evaluation is a complex process which, in addition to the analysis of actual ratings, is based on the portfolio analysis of media contents and the analysis of contents broadcasted by the competition.

The most common analyses of media content are portfolio analyses. They result in realistic indicators about which products should continue to broadcast, and which should be eliminated; in which products to invest more or less financial resources; what new products (and services) would be desirable to develop. In creating a portfolio analysis the media company opts for a strategy of diversification, i.e. identifies a set of characteristic areas of business activities, and decides how to interconnect these business activities. For analyzing the TV program with the aim to identify the parameters which will enable making strategic decisions in terms of creating a balance between programs which require additional investments and those which make a profit, as well as those which have a tendency to become profitable, the simplest portfolio analysis is the BCG (Boston Consulting Group) matrix (see Figure 2). The matrix consists of four squares (cash cow, dog, star, question mark), where the vertical axis indicates the market share of advertisers which is dependent of the market audience (creation of assets), while the horizontal axis indicates the growth rate of this market (spending of assets).

The analysis is performed by grouping one or more media products which are different from the aspect of profitability in each of these squares. The *cash cow* includes shows with little money invested in the production but bring much larger profits than projected. These shows can be regarded as a stable source of income. The *dog* square refers to the so-called stagnant shows, which deliver modest cash income. Their production is inexpensive, but they also bring low profit, which can be a danger for media company with regard to the affinity of the competition. The *stars* refer to shows which achieve high rating but their production requires large financial investments. These shows allow broadcasters to stand out in relation to the competitors. The *question mark* (or *wildcats*) indicates the field is intended for shows whose production requires large financial investments, while making low profit in the market. Such programs have the possibility to become a *star* or *cash cow*, because it sometimes takes more time for the audience to accept new program and regularly watch it. On the other hand, sometimes shows with big budgets are genuine market failures, which fail to cover even the initial costs of their production.

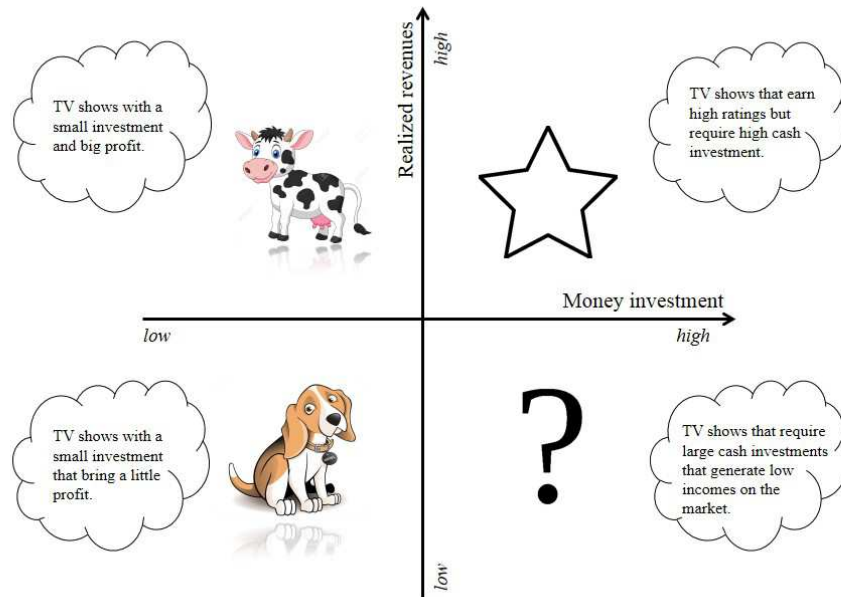


Figure 2: Boston Consulting Group matrix

By analyzing their media products using the BCG matrix, media companies create their own strategies of development. The program management has an important role in implementation of such analyses, but also in making proposals for improving the existing business processes. Thus, for example, program directors may propose that certain media contents, which are classified as a question mark but have the potential to become a star, in future seasons should be developed in the direction of a star. Such shows can provide long-term and stable income. Also, shows from the question mark which lack the potential to become a star, can be exploited to the point of turning to dogs.

The aim of portfolio analysis is to develop and invest in media content which can create higher profits, and potentially eliminate the content for which neither the audience nor the advertisers are not interested, and which bring the media company into a state of financial instability. The program management plays an important role in this segment of decision-making and development of further program strategies because the top management directly relies on its decisions and assessments. Program contents should be of high quality, and this component is exactly what makes it stand out in relation to the competition.

In addition to the evaluation of the broadcast programs, the program management also should obtain information about the events from the

immediate surroundings in which the media company operates. Knowing the media market contributes to the reduction of errors in the decision-making process. This is related to the process which is based on monitoring the changes in the fluctuation of the audience, but also changes achieved by the competitive media. It is necessary to analyze the processes of their operation, seeking opportunities and possibilities for improving the own business processes. One of the most applied concepts for analyzing the competitors is the "12-item competitor profile", whose main idea is taken from the *Mackay Envelope Corporation* (Peković, 1995). Based twelve units (general information about the media company, company size, technical capacities, audience addressed, and the like; "investments" – analysis of the annual income and budget, overall financial condition, etc.; the attitude of competition towards prices; employees; "position" – accurately and thoroughly identifying the market targeted by the competitor, the most watched and top-selling shows and their ratings; plans of the competition; advertisers; determining the reputation of the competitive company; data research; stating the reasons why some media are treated as a competition; conclusions) the goal is profiling the competition as accurately as possible. Creating such profiles helps the program management when making decisions to have a complete overview of what is happening in the media market, because the choices it makes cannot be focused only on the developments in its own company and audience, but also in competing

companies as strongholds of new and stimulating changes.

## CONCLUSION

Media companies are competing in designing new contents and formats, the quality and diversity of which become more and more reduced (strengthens the competitiveness of low quality); (Li Chiang, 2001; Anderson & Coate, 2005; Wurff & Cuilenburg, 2001; Fink, 1986). On the other hand, the strategy of the commercial media, which is based on the logic according to which the audience should be supplied with programs, the advertisers with audience (Keane, 1991) only shows that a large audience is an imperative for the financial success of the media. But this logic contradicts to the trends towards media diversification and personalization, and can be detrimental to the survival of non-adaptive media.

By conducting its business tasks, primarily aimed at the production, purchase and realization of media products, the program management must be guided by quality, diverse genre structure, the market value of the product, the needs and desires of the audience, as well as the time budget of its audience. And these are indeed the tasks of the program management, i.e. to contribute to the successful operation of their media company by choosing the right program contents and a proper schedule, developing and diversifying the portfolio of its offer, and differentiating and promoting the program services, using media innovation, as well as by finding new resources. In doing this, it should be guided by the vision that the media company of the future that seeks authenticity cannot be based solely on modern technologies and media convergence, but on relevant and interesting content.

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## FUNKCIJE I ZADACI PROGRAMSKOG MENADŽMENTA U MEDIJSKOM PREDUZEĆU

U radu se analiziraju pozicija, funkcije i zadaci programskog menadžmenta u medijskom preduzeću. S obzirom na to da je programiranje medijske ponude, kao deo strateškog planiranja, najvažniji element privlačenja i zadržavanja publike i oglašivača, programski menadžment zauzima jednu od najznačajnijih pozicija u modernim medijskim preduzećima, kako u komercijalnim tako i u javnim medijima. U zavisnosti od veličine i organizacione strukture medijskog preduzeća, programski menadžment čini zasebnu poslovnu celinu, koja, pored programskog direktora, uključuje niz medijskih eksperata zaduženih za odabir i procenu kvaliteta medijskih sadržaja, istraživanje potreba i navika medijske publike, evaluaciju emitovanih sadržaja i kontinuirano praćenje rada konkurentskih preduzeća.

**Ključne reči:** Menadžment medija, Programski menadžment, Programiranje, Medijski proizvod, TV.