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Global Television Trade Shows

If the worldwide multiplication and co-ordination of distribution windows has spurred the development of a global television business culture, global television fairs serve as that culture's high holidays, where the main categories, divisions and rhetorics of cohesion become available for analysis. Officially known as 'sales markets' or 'trade shows', they include MIP-TV (Marché International des Programmes de Télévision, or International Television Programme Market), NATPE (National Association of Television Programme Executives) and MIPCOM. Each of these global television markets has a slightly different participant base and business function, but all of them offer condensed microcosms of the business culture. This chapter takes a ritual approach to analysing global sales markets, demonstrating how the cultural distinctions that the sales markets provide not only streamline the global exchange of programming, but also confer prestige on participants, which is one of the most valuable commodities in the global television marketplace. In addition, the sales markets provide the illusion of scarcity, which is necessary to maintain high prices and demand for new product.

MAJOR GLOBAL TRADE SHOWS: MIP-TV, NATPE AND MIPCOM

Television programming fairs can be divided into three types: global fairs dedicated to programming trade of all genres from all nations; regional fairs, where distributors from the region exhibit their wares for international buyers; and genre-specific fairs that focus on particularly popular international genres, such as reality programming or documentaries. In addition, television rights for films are sold at international film festivals. Here, I concentrate on global television fairs, which serve as the primary sites where members of the global television sales community come together.

MIP-TV, held every spring in Cannes, France, is the premiere global market for television programming. Begun in 1963 as a place for European buyers and American distributors to trade programming, MIP-TV has grown into a truly international event. As Table 3.1 shows, companies representing more than 100 nations generally attend MIP-TV. This number has remained quite constant over

the past decade, attesting to the fair's international flavour. In addition, the number of companies has increased by approximately 20 per cent over the past ten years, reflecting both the growth in international television trade and the importance of MIP-TV in conducting trade. For many distributors and buyers, MIP-TV is the only international trade show that they can afford to attend (Al-Mugaiseeb, 1998). In the late 1990s, Hollywood producers began to scale back their presence at MIP-TV, but increases in mid-season replacements, which take the place of cancelled series on the American broadcast networks beginning in January, have rejuvenated Hollywood's interest in MIP-TV because it gives them a venue for selling such series internationally (Brennan, 2000).

NATPE, held alternately in Las Vegas and New Orleans each January, was founded in 1963 as a US programming trade show. However, the international contingent has grown significantly in recent years (see Table 3.1). In fact, the decision in 1993 to hire Bruce Johansen, a well-known international distributor, as CEO reflects NATPE's efforts to be 'known throughout the global television industry as the leading association for content professionals' (NATPE, 2004). NATPE's relevance for domestic television syndication has suffered in recent years due to consolidation in the syndication business and station ownership. While representatives from hundreds of stations around the country used to buy programming from dozens of syndication companies, since the relaxation of ownership regulations in the US Telecommunications Act of 1996, group owners have swallowed up local stations and centralised programme buying in to a single corporate office. At the same time, a handful of companies have come to dominate domestic syndication. However, while domestic syndication 'implodes' (Johansen, 2001), the international contingent continues to rise, growing more than 50 per cent between 1996 and 2001 (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Attendance at MIP-TV, MIPCOM and NATPE (1992-2002)

	MIP-TV		MIPCOM		NATPE	
	Participants	Countries	Participants	Countries	Participants	Int'l participants
1992	9008	101	7803	76	8674	1185
1993	9164	103	8242	84	11,277	
1994	9565	99	8499	85	11,652	
1995	10,225	107	9240	91	15,750	
1996	10,578	104	9776	92	17,694	2975
1997	10,901	103	10,145	96	16,751	
1998	10,518	102	10,428	90	17,250	
1999	10,791	101	10,571	88	17,440	
2000			11,786	89	17,520	4380
2001	11,049	90	9943	85	20,348 ⁽¹⁾	4585
2002	10,217	92	10,209	90	10,125 ⁽²⁾	

Source: MIPTV (2004b); MIPCOM (2005); NATPE (2002)

Notes:

1. The attendance figure for NATPE 2001 in part reflects relocation of the conference from New Orleans to Las Vegas, which is more readily accessible to Hollywood-based executives.
2. According to NATPE officials, this number reflects a significant drop for 2002 due to the economic downturn in general and the uncertainty following September 11.

Finally, MIPCOM, founded in 1985 and sometimes referred to as MIP-TV's younger brother, takes place in Cannes each autumn. Initially designed to include a wider range of buyers than MIP-TV, including video distributors and cable and satellite channels, MIPCOM today draws essentially the same participants as MIP-TV. MIPCOM is geared more towards selling US programming than MIP-TV, because American sellers have autumn ratings data with which to demonstrate the popularity of new programming. MIPCOM attendance grew more than 50 per cent between 1992 and 2000, before plummeting briefly in October 2001 in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks (Table 3.1). The remarkable growth of MIPCOM has paralleled the growth in international television trade over the past ten years, suggesting a connection between programming fairs and the smooth operation of international sales. Furthermore, the creation of MIPCOM demonstrates the degree to which Western programming and companies dominate international television trade. While the Hollywood majors make most of their deals with larger buyers at a regional trade fair called the Los Angeles Screenings in May, MIPCOM offers a venue for programming that was not sold at Los Angeles and for buyers who did not attend the Screenings (Roxborough and Masters, 2001).

THE BUSINESS STRUCTURE OF GLOBAL TELEVISION SALES

Before addressing the cultural dimensions of global television programming fairs in depth, I want to examine the structure of the global television industry whose representatives meet there to trade programming. Such an analysis explains the institutional forces that bring together global television merchants year after year when the direct economic benefits of the sales markets are intangible.

Paul Hirsch (1972) has examined the organisational structure of the book publishing, record and film industries, concluding that these industries exhibit a proliferation of contact personnel on the 'input' (product selection) and 'output' (promotion and marketing) sectors of the individual organisation. While his analysis does not address the television industry, it can productively be adapted to demonstrate the organisation of international television trade (see also Turow, 1997). Hirsch argues that uncertainty is the dominant feature of the culture industries. Cultural commodities such as television require substantial capital investment, but their popularity and subsequent revenues are unpredictable. Therefore, numerous sales and marketing executives are needed at the organisation's output boundary to ensure that the products receive favourable critical evaluations and that they are sufficiently differentiated from and promoted against competitors' products. In addition, the industries require a steady stream of new products at the input sector, which in turn leads to a large number of industry representatives who seek out new material (Hirsch, 1972).

Global television markets form at the intersection between sellers' output boundaries and buyers' input boundaries. That is, distributors market their finished programmes to international buyers through advertisements placed in the trade press, promotions at sales markets, direct-mailing of videotapes, e-mail, and in-person sales calls. Meanwhile, buyers constantly scan a range of possible imports for those most likely to succeed on their channels, sifting through stacks of advertisements, trade press reviews and pilot videotapes, attending numerous regional and global sales events, and receiving sales representatives, international co-producers and independent distribution agents in their offices.

According to Hirsch (1972), contact people at the output boundary of the culture industries engage in a variety of efforts to ensure commercial success, including 'linking the organisation to (1) retail outlets and (2) surrogate consumers in mass-media organizations' (p. 651). In the book industry, for instance, retail outlets include bookstores, while surrogate consumers are book reviewers whose opinions can make or break a new release. Because of the importance of surrogate consumers, promotional representatives expend a great deal of time and effort trying to sway their opinions. Global television trade shows incorporate both of Hirsch's linking strategies because they operate as the retail outlet where the organisation's contact people and the surrogate consumers meet. That is, although buyers are the primary consumer in international television sales, they ultimately serve a surrogate function because the success of an imported programme lies with viewers. Though independent, buyers' choices are never wholly their own. Instead, they receive their authority because they lay claim to being privileged interpreters of viewers' tastes, much like book reviewers. Consequently, distributors work hard to court buyers, and programming trade shows provide the primary setting for these efforts.

Despite the structural importance of global television markets, executives frequently question their economic importance, especially when it comes to the most immediately obvious characteristic of the markets: their sheer promotional extravagance. Everywhere on the sales floor loom mammoth billboards advertising new series, while lavish sales 'stands' reach to the ceiling. Warner Bros. International plastered a whole wing of the Palais de Festival in Cannes with giant Looney Tunes characters at MIP-TV 1999. MGM had lion cubs on display in a glass cage at NATPE 2001. Commenting on the complexity of preparing the sales floor, one trade show organiser explained, 'It's like building a city' (Smithard, 2002).

As one ventures further onto the sales floor, one glimpses a vast array of perquisites, or 'perks'. Several stands feature free, non-stop food or drink, while other giveaways and celebrity photo sessions lure participants to vendors' stands. At NATPE 2001, executives lined up at the Paramount stand to have their pic-



Illustration 3.1: This advertisement for MTV Networks International gives a sense of the scale of promotional activities at MIP-TV 2004.

tures taken with cheerleaders from the now-defunct XFL (Extreme Football League), a short-lived American football league co-owned by World Wrestling Entertainment and NBC, and played catch in the long hallway outside with palm-sized promotional footballs. When a particularly attractive giveaway or photo opportunity begins, word spreads across the sales floor like wildfire. In addition to the extravagance on the sales floor, several companies sponsor exclusive soirées after the floor closes. When King World International launched its remake of *Hollywood Squares* at NATPE 1998, for example, it hosted a private Elton John concert at the New Orleans Superdome, where it introduced the secret celebrity 'center square', Whoopi Goldberg (Lawrence, 2002).

Such tales of extravagance and their ensuing price tags have led many in the business to question the significance of programming fairs, especially because large distributors who shell out millions of dollars attending them claim to make few important sales there (Brennan, 1999c). Industry executives and trade show organisers have clashed publicly on several occasions over these issues. In 1999, Buena Vista Television International skipped MIP-TV, leading to speculation that other Hollywood distributors might follow suit (Brennan, 1999d). At NATPE 2002, the domestic wings of every major studio forwent sales stands for more subdued business meetings at a nearby Las Vegas hotel, and that practice has now become common (Johansen, 2002). While most executives agree that trade shows provide an important time and place to network with current and potential clients, they cast a wary eye on the extravagances of the programming fairs.

Commentators have generally treated the extravagances associated with sales markets as unnecessary indulgences, similar to corporate jets or bottomless expense accounts that need to be eliminated in the current era of corporate belt-tightening worldwide. However, business management and marketing researchers generally conclude that, although their impact cannot easily be

quantified due to the complexity of purchasing decisions and the variety of other sales efforts that buyers encounter, trade shows remain effective sales tools, offering a variety of 'pre-sale' or 'non-selling' opportunities that are crucial to future sales, especially with regard to products that entail complex purchasing decisions (Gopalakrishna *et al.*, 1995; O'Hara, 1993).

Researchers agree on the presence of four main kinds of non-selling activities at trade shows that will interest us here: establishing and renewing relationships with buyers, gathering information about the industry and competitors, creating awareness of new products and crafting corporate images (Gopalakrishna, *et al.*, 1995; Herbig, Palumbo and O'Hara, 1996; O'Hara, 1993; Rice, 1992). In addition, Lisa Penalosa (2001) suggests that trade shows serve important cultural functions such as establishing the identities of participants, instructing them in the business culture and fostering commonsense assumptions about how the industry functions. I will argue that, at least when it comes to global television trade shows, these business and cultural functions are interwoven through the process of ritualisation that occurs at the sales markets.

GLOBAL TELEVISION MARKETS AS RITUALS

The importance of surrogate consumers and the personalised nature of selling in international television require that distributors and buyers have frequent contact. Global programming fairs offer efficient settings for this task because they bring everyone together at a common place and time. Fred Cohen, President of King World International, explains that his company attends MIP-TV because 'all my buyers are here, all my customers' (Brennan, 1999a, p. 6). Kevin Sullivan, President of Canadian Sullivan Entertainment, sounds a similar note about NATPE: 'It's an important place to meet European buyers' (Kelly, 1995, p. 50). In fact, networking among executives is perhaps the most commonly accepted business function of global trade shows. But, the importance of global television markets extends far beyond such rational business functions. Sales markets provide a ritual space that allows participants to think of themselves as members of a coherent global television business community, even as they articulate differences of prestige, scarcity and corporate identity that animate the business processes of global television sales.

In his review of the literature on ritual in critical anthropology, Nick Couldry (2003) insists upon seeing rituals not as practices that smooth social differences, but as processes whereby social inequalities are naturalised through specific ritual acts. In this section, I adopt Couldry's insights in order to examine global television markets as rituals, where the shared definitions, boundaries and values of the global television business culture get expressed through a variety of concrete practices. These concrete practices allow for the smooth functioning of

global television sales, even as they elaborate and naturalise divisions among participants. Expressed through the ritual space of the marketplace by a variety of physical boundaries, these divisions distinguish among buyers and sellers, naive newcomers and wise veterans, important and insignificant companies. The physical space of the sales stand provides a key terrain for articulating the corporate identities of distributors, which in turn facilitates the process of product differentiation among competitors and helps buyers and sellers find one another in the crowded marketplace.

Rituals occur within a 'ritual space' that patterns the actions of participants, especially through the establishment and crossing of boundaries. These physical boundaries both exhibit the main categorical distinctions within the culture and naturalise those categories by embedding them in our physical actions and cognitive processes. In addition, the categories associated with the boundaries of the ritual space suggest the underlying values of the culture which, in the case of global television sales, revolve around prestige. Prestige means power in global television sales, including the power to maintain high programme prices and wide distribution, to shape programming trends, and to rise above one's competitors.

Participants at global television markets encounter a variety of boundaries that begin before they even reach the market. International participants must leave their nations of origin and pass through national border checks before arriving at the site of the market, thereby differentiating them from their fellow national citizens. It is important in this respect to recognise that many participants are among the elite in their nations, for whom international travel may not be uncommon, but each specific instance still reinforces the distinction. Even though some participants come from within the borders of the nation, they generally participate in other sales markets that occur abroad.

For almost everyone, passing into the city where the sales market takes place involves entering a site steeped in media ritual, where the division between those 'inside' and 'outside' the media are particularly keenly felt because of the close and frequent contact among media personalities and 'ordinary' people. Los Angeles, where the Screenings are held, is the heart of Hollywood, especially for international visitors, while Cannes, the site of MIP-TV and MIPCOM, has similar connotations due to the yearly film festival, though it also exudes an atmosphere of upper-crust culture because of its miles of designer shops and its location on the French Riviera. Las Vegas, meanwhile, where NATPE takes place every other year, may be a less elite location than Cannes, but it remains a popular site for Hollywood star-gazing. The businesspeople in the entertainment industry are limners who are neither fully inside nor outside the media world. According to Couldry (*ibid.*, p. 12), this distinction between being 'inside'

and 'outside' the media is the primary ritual distinction that modern media make. However, crossing into Cannes, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas clearly identifies these people not only as members of an internal jet-set, but also as members of the entertainment industry, a fact reinforced by the presence of television personalities at the markets.

At the doorway to the marketplace, participants cross the most important ritual boundary that the sales markets construct, symbolising their entrance into the culture of global television sales. Only those with proper credentials can cross this threshold, marking the distinction between those who are part of the global television business and those who are not. In Cannes, crowds of curious bystanders milling near the entrances help reinforce this distinction. Some of the clearest examples of promotional excess appear immediately inside the doorway, from billboards promoting new series to costumed characters handing out fliers. The emotional impact of these excesses, especially at the first market I attended, was quite powerful. What I described in my field notes as 'pop culture overload' adds an emotional dimension to the cognitive distinction between those inside and outside the world of global television sales.

Why is it necessary for businesspeople in global television to feel as though they are a part of a larger culture? The answer lies in the importance and unpredictability of international markets for programme buyers and sellers. Buyers need imports to programme their schedules effectively and economically, while sellers need international sales to cover their production investments. However, the uncertain success of television programming, especially when it crosses cultural boundaries, combined with the vast amount of potential programming and potential buyers to sort through, make personal relationships crucial for international sales to operate efficiently. Buyers lack any reliable predictors of the success or failure of their purchases, but no one wants to miss the newest global trends. Consequently, buyers typically rely on a handful of distributors who have reputations for successful international programmes and with whom they have long-term relationships. Thinking of themselves as members of the same culture helps buyers trust that they are getting programming of predictable quality that will likely perform as expected with audiences.

For sellers, on the other hand, a shared culture provides them with a consistent set of buyers for their new programming. More importantly, a shared culture allows all participants to trust that negotiated business arrangements will be honoured, including prompt payment of rights fees and delivery of programming, as buyers and sellers come from different nations with different laws. In addition to the underlying institutional reasons, global television merchants have good career reasons to think of themselves as members of the same community. Executives with experience in international sales move frequently between

companies, and a personal reputation in global television is a requirement for such positions.

ARTICULATING DIFFERENCES AT THE GLOBAL TELEVISION MARKETS

The ability to enter the marketplace designates one as a member of the global television business but, once inside, the creation of distinct spaces with varying degrees of accessibility within the marketplace establish significant differences among participants. The most important distinctions, which anthropologists call 'category differences' (*ibid.*, p. 28), distinguish among buyers, sellers and observers. These different categories of participants are formalised through name badges that let the numerous security guards determine who has access rights. For instance, colour-coded badges at NATPE 2001 (see Table 3.2) differentiated between buyers and representatives from various television channels, who made up the highest class of participants; exhibitors and celebrities, who made up a second tier; and representatives of various support businesses, who comprised a third. As a rule, buyers have the greatest freedom of access to restricted spaces. Within these categories, a variety of secondary differences work to establish and naturalise divisions among prestigious and upstart companies, large and small organisations and various kinds of buyers and sellers that help facilitate networking and promotional activities at the sales markets.

Secondary differences among participants get mapped onto the sales floors of the markets. At MIP-TV 2004, the Palais des Festivals was divided into seven primary sales halls, with numerous ways of distinguishing exhibitors within each hall. The largest hall was the main sales floor, which housed nearly 350 sales stands, or about 60 per cent of exhibitors. A wide hallway bisected the main sales floor, leading from the stairway at the entrance of the Palais at one end to a large, sunny café and bar area at the other end. On either side of the hall stretched thirteen rows of stands, some of which lay near the main hallway and included internationally successful companies such as the Canadian Broadcasting Company and Carsey-Werner International, and some of which were hidden in barely accessible nooks. Exhibitors of all stripes rented space on the main floor, though the vast majority were small companies with a handful of series, films, or concepts to sell, while many of the buyers were independent

Table 3.2: Badge Colours of Selected Participants at NATPE 2001

Blue	Red	Green
Broadcast Network	Exhibitor	Advertising
Buyer	Exhibitor/Buyer	Distributor/Syndicator
Cable Network	Celebrity	Public Relations

Source: NATPE (2001)



Illustration 3.2: The common practice of selling advertising space on stairways in the Palais des Festivals is an example of promotional excess.

redistributors. These tend to be the people who are most dependent upon markets like MIP-TV to conduct sales, as it offers one of the only opportunities for buyers to find new distributors, and vice-versa. During the first few days of each market, the main sales floor is thronged with people, and a frenzied din of voices and video clips fills the air. Crowds press for espressos and other drinks at the main bar, while a long wait for the handful of available tables leads participants to camp out on the stairway leading to an emergency exit. At times, the number of bodies and the full sunshine streaming in through the glass ceiling above the bar can make the entire main sales floor uncomfortably warm.

The second-largest sales space was the Espace Riviera, which lay up a flight of stairs from the main bar. Nearly 100 exhibitors set up shop here, including several, such as MTV Networks International, Granada International, Paramount and Radio Television Española, that had large reception areas and a number of meeting rooms. The difference in atmosphere between the Espace Riviera and the main sales room was palpable. Sales stands here ran three or four times larger than the average stand on the main floor, and higher ceilings



Illustration 3.3: The bar area is a popular meeting place for global sales executives. This picture was taken on the final day of MIP-TV 2004, traditionally a quiet day.



Illustration 3.4: This overhead view gives a sense of the size of the sales stands and the atmosphere in the Espace Riviera. Courtesy of Reed-Midem.

allowed for much larger exhibitions. More striking, however, was the distinctly different mood of the space which, while active and crowded, lacked the intensity of the main floor below. In large part, this difference was owed to the fact that stands were spaced further apart, which made for more isolated conversations and a more subdued climate.

Nothing prevented participants who were based on the main floor from entering the Espace Riviera, but exhibitors who set up shop there were making a statement that they were successful enough to afford the higher prices of these larger stands: they either had large financial backing or had been successful enough in international sales to 'move up', and these exhibitors generally expected buyers with larger wallets than those who trolled the main sales floor below. Alexander Charvadze, an international sales representative for TV Channel Russia, which had moved from the main floor to the Espace Riviera beginning with MIP-TV 2004, explained the change as follows: 'Last year, we located on the first floor, and it was not so good, . . . because there's not so big companies [sic]. For example, here's Beta Films, who is one of the biggest distributors in Europe, here's Granada. Good neighbours, and so it's good for us' (2004).

While many exhibitors on the main floor employed receptionists who triaged visitors and controlled access to meeting rooms in the back of the stand, in the Espace Riviera, this practice was widespread, and the size and extravagance of the restricted spaces grew. Several companies here, including CBS International, Paramount and MTV Networks International had large patios overlooking the Mediterranean where participants could escape the rush of the market and relax with free drinks and food. Access to these spaces was determined by personal contact with sales executives, usually through appointments set up months in advance, and getting a meeting simply by showing up at the stand was nearly impossible.

In terms of the mood created and the prestige of the exhibitors, Exhibition Halls A, B and C fall somewhere between the main sales floor and the Espace Riviera.



Illustration 3.5: The secluded Paramount International Television patio overlooks the Mediterranean.

Each of these halls is smaller, housing between four and eleven companies, some of whom have good-sized stands with meeting areas that look out over the sea, while others are as humble as the humblest stands on the main floor. Canadian-based Chum City International, a successful distributor of formats, series and feature films has for years had a modest stand in Hall A across from RTV Slovenia, whose stand was little more than a table and chairs. These smaller exhibition halls attracted two classes of exhibitors: good-size distributors who felt that they didn't need a large number of co-exhibitors to attract buyers, and smaller companies who did little international business. The moods in each of these halls was decidedly more subdued than in either the main floor or the Espace Riviera because the small number of stands tended to attract few wanderers.

On the third level, Exhibition Hall G contained some twenty exhibitors, many of whom were among the most prominent names in international television, including Discovery Channels International, Alliance Atlantis and the BBC. Most of the large stands in this area were located in their own antechambers or hallways off the main third-level hallway. Along the main hallway lay a number



Illustration 3.6: The BBC Worldwide sales stand sits apart from other stands in Exhibition Hall G at MIP-TV 2004.



Illustration 3.7: Discovery Communications' sales stand lies in a sunken antechamber in Hall G. MIP-TV 2004.

of smaller distributors in modest stands similar to those on the main floor, such as the Bulgarian National Television stand. Despite the prestige of the larger distributors in this hall, they remained generally accessible, and the volume of traffic through the hall was high, allowing smaller distributors access to a good number of passers-by, although it seems unlikely that most of them would have been in the market for the programming sold by the smaller distributors.

Exhibition Hall H, on the fourth level, housed four sales stands in a large space that provided the most refined and peaceful atmosphere of any of the exhibition halls. The sales stands here were massive, and included Universal Television International, Endemol Entertainment, Fremantle, Southern Star, RTL and Telefe International. Several of these stands were shared by two or more companies, such as Fremantle and RTL or Endemol and Telefe. Except for occasional wanderers who stopped in to gawk at the stands and take pictures, almost everyone who came into this hall had an appointment.

Immediately outside Hall H, on the fourth and fifth levels, are the cheapest sales stands in the Palais, which are associated with the European Union's



Illustration 3.8: The Endemol/Telefe sales stand in Exhibition Hall H offers a large degree of privacy and a relaxed atmosphere. MIP-TV 2004.



Illustration 3.9: The reception area for the collection of independent television producers associated with the MEDIA Programme sits at the top level of the main stairway in the Palais des Festivals. MIP-TV 2004.

MEDIA Programme. The MEDIA Programme is designed to facilitate the production and region-wide circulation of European-produced audiovisual materials. At the top of the escalator to level four sat a clearing-house for members of the MEDIA Programme, consisting of a reception area and two long racks of fliers for the programming handled through MEDIA. Typically, each company has a representative who attends the sales market and meets with interested buyers, though a single representative may work for several independent producers at once. These companies have sales stands along the hallways on the fourth and fifth levels that consist of metal chairs and a TV/VCR hook-up, surrounded by a metal cage. Here, companies such as the British Film Institute and the Norwegian Film Institute set up shop. Again, only buyers interested in specific distributors or those looking for non-commercial and independent programming walk among these stands. In fact, the MIP-TV 2004 'List & Maps of Stands' does not even designate which companies are located in the more than thirty stands used by MEDIA Programme participants (MIP-TV, 2004b). For most of the days of the market, the mood surrounding these stands



Illustration 3.10: The typical sales stand for MEDIA Programme participants includes metal chairs and a TV/VCR hook-up, surrounded by a metal cage. MIP-TV 2004.

can best be described as desolate, although at numerous times each day things do get lively, especially at the bar on the fifth level.

Finally, a handful of sales stands sit apart from others in their own halls or isolated spaces. Generally, these are the largest of the large stands and belong to the powerhouses of the global television business, such as Twentieth Century-Fox Television Distribution and Warner Bros. International Television. For the past several years, Warner Bros. International Television has maintained one of the largest, most visible and least accessible sales stands at MIP-TV and MIPCOM. Located directly above the main entrance, access to the Warner Bros. stand is gained from the second level of the Palais. A mural depicting great moments in the history of film-making at Warner Bros. stretches fifty feet across the length of the stand, below which lie two entrances to the sunshine-filled meeting rooms. A large front desk staffed with several receptionists greets visitors as they come up the escalator to the second level, and two gangplanks guarded by velvet ropes and security guards lead over the main Palais entrance below into the sales hall. The Twentieth Century-Fox Television stand encompasses all of Exhibition Hall E, which lies at the top of an unmarked staircase on the third level. Meeting rooms line the hallway that leads from the reception desk to a secluded outdoor patio, and receptionists and security personnel guard the entrance to the hall.

Restricting access to sales stands adds an allure of desirability to distributors' products, which is critical in an industry where purchasing decisions rest largely on hunches. The challenges of national, regional, racial, ethnic and historical differences associated with international television trade make it tough for buyers to figure out which imported series will work in their markets. For one thing, the success of a series in one market by no means guarantees success in other markets. In addition, methodologically consistent ratings data from around the world has only recently started to become available (Mahoney, 1991), but even ratings data cannot explain the reasons behind a series' performance, and there-



Illustration 3.11: The well-guarded Warner Bros. International Television sales stand restricts entry to authorised visitors only. This picture was taken on the final day of the market, when few people are around. MIP-TV 2004.

fore cannot effectively guide future buying decisions. While some buyers screen imports for focus groups, the relative cheapness of imported programming discourages the practice in most markets. Furthermore, buyers rarely conduct follow-up research to discover whether viewers responded to the same elements in imports as focus group participants did, so again buyers have few objective criteria on which to base their decisions (Duran, 1999; Mulder, 1999).

Lacking objective criteria, buyers usually rely instead on a distributor's track record in international sales, with the expectation that distributors' new series will perform as well as their previous ones. Restricting access to sales stands and sales agents gives visible evidence to the claim that one's programming is widely sought-after. One commentator writes that 'part of what a station is buying is the promise and grandeur and power of a major syndicator or studio' (Bednarski, 2001, p. 21). It should be noted, however, that distributors' reputations probably have little impact on the popularity of programming with viewers abroad, except that large, successful distributors can guarantee larger promotional budgets for imports. For instance, few viewers in the US, much less worldwide, are aware that Warner Bros. distributed *Friends* or that Viacom marketed *The Cosby Show* (1984–92).

The lack of access to sales stands and exhibition halls also creates artificial scarcity in an industry where product is abundant. Again, because of the public good nature of television, programming is quite easily and cheaply traded, which tends to drive down prices. In order to maintain high prices and demand, distributors use temporal scarcity to try to enforce product scarcity. That is, because executives at the large distributors cannot possibly meet with everyone during the few days that the markets are open, the scarcity of time becomes a way to artificially restrict buyers from product.

In addition to the boundaries that distinguish certain sales halls and distributors from one another, sales markets like MIP-TV offer a variety of even more restricted spaces. At MIP-TV 1999, a VIP tent sat on the lawn outside the Palais, where only MIP-TV officials, guests and other VIPs were allowed. The tent had a large, indoor seating area and an outside café with covered and uncovered tables set up on the grass, where one felt that the business of the market was much further away than just a few yards. A number of distributors host swanky, private parties after the sales floor closes on yachts docked behind the Palais. Typically, these high-profile parties mark anniversaries, especially successful programme sales, or other important milestones for the sponsors. About twenty different distributors sponsor yacht parties during each market. In addition, as mentioned above, several mega-distributors host exclusive, invitation-only soirées at local hotspots or remote chateaux in the French Riviera. An invitation to one of these exclusive parties illustrates that one has 'arrived' in international



Illustration 3.12: The Fremantle Media yacht, anchored outside the Palais des Festivals, hosted swanky, after-hours parties at MIP-TV 2004.

syndication, and attendance at the global programming fairs is crucial for gaining access to these select in-groups (Lawrence, 2002).

While the physical space of the Palais des Festivals allows participants to think of themselves as members of a cohesive global television business community, all of whom come together at the same place and time each year, the marketplace also articulates a number of differences among participants through various boundaries, including different exhibition halls, privileged access to sales stands and other areas and inclusion or exclusion from after-hours parties. These boundaries establish which companies and executives have prestige, and which do not. Distributors spend lavishly to demonstrate their success, as they strive to achieve or maintain positions among the elite in global television.

The differences established among participants in the global television sales markets are not merely the secondary effects of a global television economy, but are integral to the business of global television trade. Prestige, which can only be conferred by one's colleagues in the business, is one of the main commodities on display during the markets. Explaining his organisation's reasons for attending MIP-TV, TV Channel Russia's Charvadze (2004) says,

I think first is respect, and second is money, because [we] have without sales already enough money. But this feeling that people know your channel in Europe ... because if they know you, they buy your product, if they know you, they want to co-produce with you, if they know you, they just understand that you are stable and that you are a good partner.

It is important to note that the prestige felt by Charvadze comes from the recognition of his organisation among European executives. In this way, power differences in the world system help determine the level of prestige bestowed by the 'respect' of other organisations. According to Charvadze, TV Channel

Russia is the 'Warner Bros.' of the former USSR nations, or the most important and prestigious programme supplier, but he considers the respect of executives in the more lucrative European markets more important. In this way, worldwide power relations based on economic differences determine cultural power relations that come from the ritual practices of the global television markets. Economic relations, however, offer only the crudest distinctions among participants; within these broad divisions, a number of finer cultural distinctions help construct different corporate identities and manage the flow of 'buzz' about market trends.

CONSTRUCTING CORPORATE IDENTITY THROUGH SALES STANDS

Within the different sales halls of the marketplaces, the boundaries between exhibitors are marked off by sales stands, which serve as the most visible expressions of corporate differentiation and identity, or brands. While the stands follow the same general layout, they tend to take three different paths in constructing brands: genre-based brands, nationally or ethnically based brands and universal brands. In addition, many distributors link their branding efforts to a particular programme they are spotlighting at the market, in an effort to generate buzz among their fellow participants.

Exhibitors follow one of two broad strategies when constructing their sales stand: while almost every stand has a reception desk and meeting areas, one set of exhibitors follow a maximalist strategy that highlights the volume of programming that they sell; the other follows a minimalist strategy that highlights a single series or, simply, the corporate logo. Most exhibitors staff their reception desk and even their sales team with young women, most of whom are white and many of whom are blonde. Here, the gender distinctions within the industry become clear. To some degree, this practice harks back to an earlier time when buyers were mostly men, which is no longer the case. A random sample of acqui-



Illustration 3.13: Distributor em.tv used a 'maximalist' strategy in designing its sales stand for MIP-TV 2004, which emphasised the variety of programmes for sale.



Illustration 3.14: Distributor France Televisions followed a minimalist strategy in its sales stand design for MIP-TV 2004, which emphasised the corporate brand rather than the amount of programming on offer.

sitions executives at MIPCOM 2002, for instance, reveals roughly equal numbers of men and women, a fact that may reflect a glass ceiling that keeps women from rising above the level of programme buyer in their organisations. One distributor I interviewed suggested that the reason so many women are receptionists and sales agents is that the owners of the sales organisations, who are typically men, think women are unlikely to start their own businesses and steal clients. Apparently, some women take advantage of this sexist stereotype to gain experience and contacts before starting their own companies.

For distributors, branding is a cultural tool of significant economic importance that allows them to differentiate themselves from the competition. Branding adds value, or brand equity, to a distributor's products by imbuing them with desirable qualities (Keller, 2000, p. 115). In crowded markets where it is difficult to distinguish between competing products, such as global television sales, 'corporate identity carries a bigger share of the responsibility for sustaining [profit] margins' (Hatch and Schultz, 2000, p. 13). As channel competition and competition among various video distribution systems have become more intense, branding has evolved into a vital component of sellers' and buyers' strategies, especially in a digital world, where brands promise predictable textual experiences across multiple audiovisual platforms, including television, the internet and mobile devices. Digital television channels often provide predictability by concentrating on a small number of genres, and many global television distributors also specialise in these same genres.

Product brands, based on actual or perceived attributes of products, are the most common type of brand (Olins, 2000, p. 58). Programming genres and sub-genres form the primary product market in international television, around which many distributors build their corporate identities. Gardening for Real People, Inc. and The Sportsman's Showcase with Ken Tucker, for example, use the subgenres of 'how-to' gardening and outdoor programming, respectively, to

distinguish themselves on the sales floor. 4Kids Entertainment, which made its mark distributing the globally popular *Pokemon* series, built its brand and its sales stand around numerous animated characters at MIP-TV 2004. As increased channel capacity worldwide has fragmented television audiences into smaller and smaller niches, served by increasingly focused speciality channels, such niche-distributors have flourished. However, some of the largest corporations in international television also build their brands around programming genre. Carsey-Werner International, King World International and Playboy TV International all have established themselves as global experts in ensemble situation comedies, game-show formats and erotic programming, respectively.

While channel growth has increased the value of niche programming, the most profitable genres sold at the fairs are still those that reach the widest and most lucrative audiences. Large corporations concentrate on programming designed for such audiences, and their efforts to attract buyers from channels that target broad audiences create holes for niche-providers. International television trade, then, does not homogenise cultural differences: instead, it searches out differences and structures them into a coherent hierarchy based upon perceived economic value. These hierarchies are never inflexible, however, because industry changes can alter the popularity of certain programming genres. Carsey-Werner International capitalised on revised attitudes about the international marketability of comedies in the early 1990s (Dupagne, 1992; Tobin, 1990), while Playboy TV International has benefited from worldwide growth in pay-per-view channels, which are often willing to carry adult programming (Davies, 1998).

Perhaps the most effective brand identities in international television come from a combination of proven ability in a programming genre and a clear national image. Slick American action dramas, Latin American *telenovelas*, Australian documentaries, German police dramas and Japanese animation all offer



Illustration 3.15: Distributor 4Kids Entertainment designed its MIP-TV 2004 sales stand around its signature genre, children's anime.

good examples of this strategy. In the minds of many buyers, these nations are synonymous with these genres. However, given the small number of programming genres seen as capable of international export and the vague images that some nations conjure up in buyers' minds, this form of branding is unavailable to many distributors.

Although the business management literature has long recognised that nation of origin can positively influence sales of certain products, O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000) argue that national identities are generally too multifaceted to provide the clarity that successful brands require. Instead, a nation's reputation in certain product categories is more likely to influence purchasing decisions, as happens when a consumer purchases a Swiss watch over a comparable Mexican one. In these instances, individual producers, such as Bulova, can benefit from the overall prestige of the nation. While the distinction between reputation and national image is important, we also need to recognise that national reputation in specific products must be built and maintained. In international television, part of the strategy that distributors employ to build a reputation involves exhibiting a recognisable national image at market, which draws on associations with the nation that buyers presumably already carry.

Under certain buying conditions, nation of origin becomes more salient. Studies of purchasing behaviour have identified several ways that people make buying decisions, including impulse-buying, habit-buying and deliberate buying. Deliberate buying occurs 'when no single option is superior to others' (ibid, p. 62), and is often accompanied by risk. In such instances, nation of origin has the greatest influence on purchasing decisions because it can help identify one option as superior. As we have seen, because of the high risk of failure of imported programming, programme buyers are quite deliberate in making buying decisions. Thus, nation of origin is likely to be an important consideration in international television syndication.

Many exhibitors try to leverage national identity to increase brand equity. NATPE 2001 featured sales pavilions dedicated to programming from Belgium, the UK, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Quebec, Ireland, Korea, the Nordic countries, Spain, Italy, France and Switzerland. The French pavilion, for example, drew on two recognisable French images: a French-style café, large enough to give it the ambience of an open-air café in the otherwise cramped exhibition hall, surrounded by brightly coloured facades of quaint, seventeenth-century French buildings, which housed the sales rooms of the pavilion's forty-two corporate sponsors.

Individual sales stands also make frequent use of nationally distinctive colours, architecture and decoration. At MIP-TV 2004, Indian commercial



Illustration 3.16: The sales stand of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), Egypt's public broadcaster, featured nationally distinctive accoutrements at MIP-TV 2004.

broadcaster Zee TV adorned its sales stand with puppets, swag lamps, brightly coloured fabrics and a traditional Indian puppeteer to advertise its new branded line of 'alternative lifestyle' programmes dubbed 'Asian Mantra'.

If properly managed, a strong national image acts as a family brand for a variety of genres and distributors, increasing the levels of the brand hierarchy and creating flexibility. Recognisable family brands 'allow access to global associations that consumers may have toward the company [or nation]', while sub-brands associated with particular genres 'can help customers better understand how products vary' (Keller, 2000, p. 126–7). Hence, the French pavilion draws on the image of France as a cultured nation at the level of the family brand, while French animation companies distinguish themselves from Japanese companies by selling slower-paced series that highlight historical, educational and fantastic themes. Meanwhile, Zee TV's 'Asian Mantra' programmes featured documentaries, lifestyle and talk shows focused on spirituality, sexuality, tribal wisdom and other topics typically associated with India. Just as a national brand cannot succeed without a distinct product

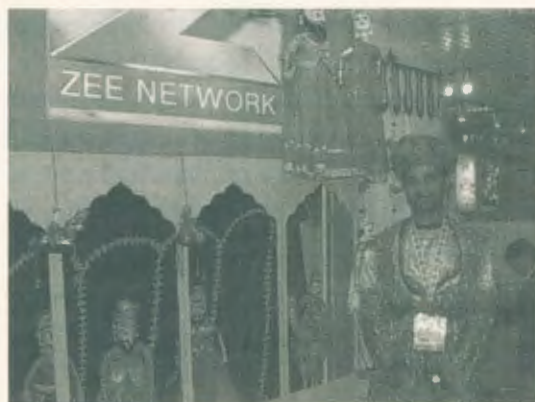


Illustration 3.17: A traditional Indian puppeteer adds a touch of Indian culture to the Zee Networks sales stand at MIP-TV 2004.

category, individual genres receive added differentiation and desirability through the creation of a strong national brand.

The attempt to create a slice of France or India at sales markets runs counter to the conventional wisdom that international sales require producers around the world to copy Hollywood's aesthetics. If these distributors hoped to emphasise the similarity between their programming and American-style programming, they would have made quite different exhibition decisions. Instead, they are trying to build brand equity through cultural distinctiveness. Of course, the degree to which a few tables and some cardboard cut-outs express the full complexity of French culture is debatable. Still, as McCrone, Morris and Kiely (1995) argue regarding efforts to construct a brand identity for the Scottish heritage industry, the commodification of national culture may be limiting, distorting and stereotyping, but it is never politically vacant or univocal. Commodified cultural expressions can serve radical as well as conservative political ends.

Producers from nations that have been trading programming internationally for a long time and those with strong national or ethnic associations are well positioned to use branding in this manner. Distributors without readily identifiable national or ethnic images or those that do not have expertise in a particular programming genre find branding more difficult. South Korea's MBC Productions, for example, brought 96 programmes to NATPE 2001, but little in the programming, promotional materials or exhibition design identified the series or the producer with Korea. In short, it had a weak brand identity, in part because MBC did not create a clear Korean image. Because nations with long histories in television production dominate the most lucrative programming genres, it is difficult for new entrants to discover a profitable niche. Nevertheless, new opportunities regularly emerge. Recently, for example, we witnessed the remarkable success of reality formats like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* from Western Europe, which has now become synonymous with the genre. Zee TV's efforts to corner the market on the 'alternative lifestyle' subgenre with Orientalist images of Indian culture reflects a similar strategy.

As distributors become more and more successful, many of them chafe against the confines of their national identities and seek independent corporate identities. In spite of the usefulness of national identity for branding, most of the buyers I spoke with felt that cultural differences between their audiences and imported programmes cause difficulty (Hoskins and Mirus, 1988). While national identity may help a distributor build a brand presence, those who can avoid nationalist associations may benefit from appearing more universal. Warner Bros. International, for instance, crafted its presence at MIPCOM 2002 and MIP-TV 2004 self-referentially around a series of animated scenes from



Illustration 3.18: Warner Bros. International Television built its brand identity at its MIP-TV 2004 sales stand self-referentially, around animated recreations of film-making history at the studio.

Warner Bros. movie history, imbuing the company with attributes of classic cinema and longevity of international appeal.

THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF 'BUZZ'

Along with branding, the management of 'buzz' is one of the most important business functions performed by the rituals of the global sales markets. The multiple distinctions among participants that emerge from the establishment and crossing of boundaries facilitate the four business functions of international trade shows, as outlined above: establishing and renewing relationships, gathering information about the industry and competitors, creating awareness of new products and crafting corporate images. A key component to each of these functions is the management of buzz at the marketplace, which helps explain their signature promotional excesses. To be effective, buzz must circulate among those participants who are most likely to respond, and the creation of various networks of participants through the markets' ritual processes facilitates this circulation.

We have already seen how ritual boundaries sort participants into various categories. This process governs the establishment and renewal of networks among participants with similar interests and reputations. In other words, the rituals of the marketplace encourage participants to think of themselves both as *different* from some and *similar* to others. Effective networking is complicated by the volume and diversity of attendants with varying budgets and business priorities. From the distributor's perspective, price differentials among the world's buyers are extreme, ranging in 2004 from as much as \$2 million per hour of programming in the US networks to as low as \$30 per hour in Cuba (see Table 1.2). From the perspective of those who purchase programming, certain genres and national brands 'travel' better across cultural boundaries. Michael Puopolo, Manager of International Research for Warner Bros. International Television,

expresses a common refrain when he says that 'better than any other culture, American culture transfers well to the rest of the world' (1999). In addition, different buyers are seeking different kinds of programming, while some distributors specialise in certain genres and not others.

The arrangement of sales spaces and differential access at the global sales markets create numerous in- and out-groups that facilitate networking by allowing some interactions while discouraging others. Girts Licis (1999), head of acquisitions and sales for Latvian Television, who was attending one of his first global markets at MIP-TV 1999, reported that sales agents from large US and European distributors would not meet with him. The difficulties that newcomers have doing business at the marketplaces are not limited to small buyers dealing with Hollywood distributors. Neophyte producers looking to sell their product who lack a network of business contacts also have difficulty getting meetings with potential buyers, who are busy meeting with sellers with whom they already have long-term relationships (Brown, 2001).

One of the most effective ways to break through such barriers is to create buzz around one's products or companies. Quite simply, buzz refers to business-related word of mouth that circulates year-round, but becomes more intense and concentrated in the 'incestuous environment' of global television markets (Smithard, 2002). Although buzz is a vital aspect of global television sales, it has received almost no attention from media scholars. Industrial economists, however, have written about the role of buzz in global industries generally. Bathelt, Malmberg and Maskell's (2004) definition is worth quoting at length here:

Buzz refers to the information and communication ecology created by face-to-face contacts, co-location, and co-presence of people and firms within the same industry and place or region. This buzz consists of specific information and continuous updates of this information, intended and unanticipated learning processes in organized and accidental meetings, the application of the same interpretive schemas and mutual understanding of new knowledge and technologies, as well as shared cultural traditions and habits within a particular technology field, which stimulate the establishment of conventions and other institutional arrangements. Actors continually contribute to and benefit from the diffusion of information, gossip, and news by just 'being there.' (p. 38)

In other words, buzz is a cultural phenomenon, in the sense of a symbolic activity engaged in by a specific society, which has unique business consequences. In this way, buzz is a 'cultural economic' activity that demonstrates the interdependence of cultural and economic practices within the global television sales business (see Du Gay and Pryke, 2002).

Trade journals provide much of the grist for sales-floor buzz at the global markets. Fair organisers publish their own daily recaps of news, and dozens of trade journals run special daily issues available only on the sales floor, including *Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*, *Television International* and *Television Business International*. Participants tear through stacks of these free journals for the latest information, making the trade journal stands one of the liveliest areas of the market, typically containing dozens of special publications. Debbie Lawrence, Managing Director of Lippin Group's London Office, which handles public relations at the television fairs for several large American and European distributors, explains the importance of trade journal coverage at the fairs plainly: 'To be one of the main distributors of drama and not to be in the daily drama feature [of the organiser's publication] is seen as a disaster' (2002). Thus, part of the purpose of trade journals from the distributors' perspective is to ensure that they and their firm become part of the sales-floor buzz.

The buzz that emanates from the trade journals is an effort to discover the 'next big thing' in global television trends, a phrase commonly found in trade journal articles about the sales markets. A great deal of effort goes into this endeavour, bearing witness to the fact that programming from abroad influences domestic television cultures in nations around the world. Jörg Langer, managing director of T&G Films in Berlin, explains,

I see MIP as a unique instrument for getting an overview of the market situation. What are the trends? What is being internationally produced? More series, singles, docudrama, docusoap? In Germany we have all the trends in the following year, so I get an idea of what we can do. On the other hand, I get an impression of what our competitors are doing.' (Brown, 2001, p. 44)

In addition, participants share more quotidian business information. Kaisa Kriek, the programme sales manager for Netherlands Public Broadcasting, for example, told me that she shares pricing information with fellow public broadcasting representatives and European distributors whom she knows well (2004). Also, several distributors confirmed that they maintain a collective 'blacklist' of untrustworthy buyers. Both of these activities require significant trust among participants, which the close-knit networks created by the sales markets' differentiation strategies help make possible.

The search for the newest trends extends to individual programmes, which distributors try to promote through buzz. In fact, most of the promotional excesses discussed above flow from the effort to create buzz about new programming. Buzz surrounds celebrity appearances and giveaways on the sales floor, large release parties at the sales stands, and star-studded, invitation-only



Illustration 3.19: Levymann Entertainment constructed its sales stand around its newest programme offering, *Itty Bitty Heart Beats*.

galas. All of these promotional efforts share a similar goal of generating excitement and interest around new series, a goal perhaps best served by global television trade shows. Again, Lippin's Lawrence explains, 'Television markets are certainly a time to be focused on new shows and therefore [to] create buzz for all new programming' (2002). Similarly, Bruce Johansen, former President and CEO of NATPE says, 'Obviously, I am biased, but I think it would be very difficult to orchestrate buzz without the focus of a trade meeting. ... Trade shows themselves create buzz that radiates onto the product' (2002). Promotional efforts at the sales fairs also reflect Hirsch's (1972) insight that the culture industries must differentially promote new product, lavishing some with extensive attention while letting others flounder. Because of their unpredictable performance, organisations overproduce new products in the hopes that a small percentage will catch on, and then heavily promote only those that they consider the most likely to succeed.

The role that buzz plays in creating favourable impressions of programming and distributors, and the presumed influences that such impressions have on eventual buying decisions, goes a long way towards explaining the obvious extravagances of the global programming fairs. Because buyers function as surrogate consumers in international television, distributors can focus their promotional efforts on courting their favour, rather than trying to create programmes that appeal to viewers around the world with unknown and unpredictable tastes. This practice rationalises the process of global television sales and makes manageable the otherwise insurmountable task of trying to understand the cultural affinities and differences between specific national and subnational groups and specific television series or films.

A textbook example of a distributor's effort to create buzz through promotional excess occurred at NATPE 2001 with Universal Studios' feature film, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (2000), a remake of the animated Dr Seuss

classic, starring Jim Carrey. Universal Television built a twenty-foot tall replica of Mount Crumpit, the mythic home of the Grinch, to house its sales staff. On the first evening of the market, Universal hosted a cocktail party featuring bright green cocktails in glasses bearing Grinch stickers and music from the film's soundtrack played over loudspeakers. The main attraction was the Grinch's pet dog, Max, supposedly the same dog that had appeared in the film. Max entertained guests with a variety of tricks and sat for pictures with a long line of guests, all the while wearing a pair of antlers that the Grinch had tied to his head in the film in order to make him look like a reindeer. As with all such photo opportunities at the markets, buyers formed a separate line that received priority over other guests, again reinforcing the main category distinction between buyers and others at the markets.

The cocktail party for *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* was announced in the trade press and the *NATPE Daily News*, and accompanied by full-page advertisements in several trade journals. Anyone who missed these announcements, however, could not help but notice the loud music blaring across the sales floor. Attracted by the music, I made my way through the other sales booth to the Universal stand, where I saw about 100 guests wandering through the sales stand, crowding the stairs to get free drinks at the bar on the second level and milling about in the aisles in front of the stand. Unlike many such parties, this was an open event, and everyone on the sales floor could attend, get free cocktails and food, and have their pictures taken with Max the dog.

Ironically, Universal's Grinch-inspired cocktail party was not primarily designed to promote the film. By the time of NATPE 2001, Disney/ABC had sewn up all domestic cable and broadcast rights to the film until 2014, with the first airing not scheduled until 2004. Thus, domestic executives, who made up more than three-quarters of attendees at NATPE 2001, could not have bought rights to the film even if they had wanted to. Instead, the decision to spotlight *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, instead of a television series that was available to all buyers, seems to have been designed primarily to call attention to Universal's overall programming catalogue, and secondarily to promote the film to international buyers. Universal's strongest new syndicated series in 2001 was the dating game show *The Fifth Wheel* (2001–4), but at the time of NATPE, the series had sold only marginally well, and was nothing to build a promotional campaign around. Likewise, the studio's best performing new network series, *The District* (2000–4), had garnered only mild interest among international buyers. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, on the other hand, was one of the top-grossing films of 2000, and had been released worldwide only one month earlier. Thus, in the absence of a break-out television series to support its promotional buzz, Universal chose instead to capitalise on the buzz that already

surrounded *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, in the hopes that it might net some international sales and also spill over to the rest of its programming.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the global television markets as rituals, where the divisions of the global television business are constructed and naturalised, helps us appreciate the role that the business culture plays in facilitating international trade. The complexity of buying decisions, the importance of global sales revenues and the magnified uncertainties surrounding the local appeal of globally traded television programming all frustrate effective global television sales. In order to function effectively and efficiently, the global television marketplace requires close relationships among buyers and sellers, clearly defined corporate identities and up-to-date information about new programming trends, all of which get communicated through the ritual practices of the global television markets.

Differentiation is a cultural practice enacted through ritual that serves specific business functions in global television trade. Global sales markets are the primary sites where these differentiations occur, because all distributors and buyers compete with one another in global commercial television trade. In addition, the most precious commodity – prestige – can only be conferred through cultural practices such as those we witness at sales markets. These practices also create artificial scarcity, which keeps both demand and prices high for large distributors. In other words, to function effectively, the process of global television sales requires the cultural practices outlined in this chapter. Hence, the shared assumptions, blind spots and power relations inherent in the business culture of global television shape the business practices of television industries everywhere, profoundly influencing which programmes and genres travel worldwide.

Few television merchants, however, operate exclusively in the global marketplace. Most distributors continue to be heavily dependent upon domestic markets for much, if not most, of their revenues. Likewise, buyers compete primarily in their domestic markets, as they wrangle with others for the most promising imports, formats and co-production opportunities. In the remainder of this volume, we will explore the programme purchasing and scheduling practices of national, subnational and transnational television channels.