

Striving to bridge the information gap

Manuel Gonçalves, CEO and Vice-Chairman of Teledifusão de Macau (TDM)



Manuel Gonçalves

Q. What is TDM's role as a public service broadcaster?

As a public service broadcaster, TDM has three main roles: to inform, to entertain and to educate. We also believe that our operation has to be based on the principles of universality of service, diversity of programming and provision for minority audiences.

To do this, we currently operate six TV channels and two radio stations serving a population of 550 thousand. Most of TDM channels broadcast in Chinese but we also have a TV channel and a radio station broadcasting in Portuguese. Chinese and Portuguese are both official languages in Macau. Recently we started developing our production capability in English to serve an increasingly number of expatriates working in Macau.

Q. How has the response been since the launch of your new satellite channel and a couple of digital terrestrial channels in 2009?

TDM's new TV digital terrestrial channels were launched last year and are now widely available for local audiences. Currently we have two channels operating simultaneously in analogue and digital while the others are only available in our digital terrestrial platform. Our satellite channel has an ambitious role of bringing Portuguese speaking countries to China and taking China to the Portuguese speaking countries.

Portuguese is spoken in eight countries located in Europe, South America, Africa and Asia. These countries have, over the years, developed very dynamic commercial and political relations with China, yet there is very little knowledge about each other.

Our satellite channel seeks to bridge that information gap by providing programmes about Portuguese speaking countries to Chinese audiences and taking programmes about China to Portuguese speaking audiences.

Q. How is TDM using new technologies to increase its range of services and reach new audiences?

TDM's TV operations are based on its analogue and digital terrestrial platforms. Analogue broadcasting is scheduled to be turned off by the end of 2012. TDM also has a range of websites covering all our operations and is also present in major social networks.

Q. What are TDM's priorities in terms of programming for us?

TDM strives to develop local talents. Being a small city with a reduced population, training of our manpower is of utmost importance in order to establish a creative and engaged workforce able to produce quality programmes. Our programmes seek to show the cultural diversity, rich history and the dynamic social economic development that characterizes Macau.

Q. How much of your content is produced for the Chinese and Portuguese speakers respectively?

The majority of Macau's population (over 95 percent) speaks Chinese, so naturally, most of our content is produced in Chinese, specifically in Cantonese, the regional dialect widely spoken in Macau.

We also have news bulletins in Putonghua (Mandarin) aiming to reach a wider number of viewers across the region.

In addition, we produce content in Portuguese serving a minority of the population who speaks this language, an official language in Macau Special Administrative Region.

Mostly, we produce news and current affairs programmes aiming to keep this linguistic group up-to-date with major local and regional events.

Recently we have also started developing the production of English language content to serve the needs of expatriates living in Macau. Currently, we produce a daily 30-minute local news bulletin and a weekly talk show. ●

Reaching the user much more quickly

Shaun Seow, Deputy CEO (News, Radio, Print & Interactive), MediaCorp, Singapore



Shaun Seow

Q. MediaCorp was one of the leaders among Asian broadcasters in creating a fully digital newsroom. Was it a difficult process?

News production is arguably one of the most demanding among TV productions. MediaCorp had planned to be on the digital path for years and the change was implemented in stages. The process was carefully orchestrated to install a server-based, non-linear system, which we fondly called Automated Digital Asset Management (ADAM), and an automated studio production. We are almost there in fully digitalising our newsroom; what's left is some back-end support.

The entire exercise took several years, during which we had to grapple with issues like returns on the investment, scoping the technical requirements and finding a good fit of systems that can scale.

More than financials and technology, the biggest challenge related to people issues. We had to train journalists, create new jobs in media management and re-design the workflow. All required detailed coordination and consistent education of users. Fortunately, the journalists saw the value the changes brought - tools to help them do their jobs better and overcome the inefficiencies of a tape-based system. Today, in the words of a news producer, "we can't imagine life without ADAM".

Q. You now have 'NewsHub', a centre that provides news content for television, radio, print and the Internet all at the same time. Could you tell us something about how it operates?

With NewsHub, we have centralised our local news gathering resources so that it is now a one-stop shop generating reports for all our media platforms - print, radio, TV and Interactive.

Our reporters are trained to report for at least two media genres, for example, TV/radio, print or the Internet, while producer or editors re-version the copy for the respective platforms. Our desired outcomes are several. First is to shorten the news production cycle. Hence, one main beneficiary is our online and mobile news which now reaches the user much faster. Another is to avoid duplicating resources in covering the straightforward press conferences. The third is that the strength in numbers would allow most of our journalists to specialise in various beats, so that they become authorities on for example, legal or economic beats rather than just a TV or print reporter covering everything under the sun.

But we are mindful of this: the hub concept must still allow the various media platforms to produce their respective scoops and play to their individual strengths.

Q. Did your staff adapt to the changes enthusiastically, and how important was training?

For many staff, the change from reporting for one media to bi- or even tri-media was a very big step. This means training plays a very important part. Change always poses challenges, and I think the staff's feelings were mixed towards the NewsHub idea when it started. But once they were all housed together and began sharing, the synergies started developing. Now, eight months on, almost two-third of our journalists have received cross platform training and are bi-media. There are teething issues still, no doubt. But what is encouraging is the enthusiasm among the new staff hires: they join NewsHub eager to work across media platforms, which is half the battle won.

Q. MediaCorp has also led the way in using other new technologies, such as producing content for mobile phones. How successful has this been?

We have had many initiatives in the mobile content area, pushing the envelope each year.

- Asia's first Chinese mobile drama series created only for the mobile screen on 3G in 2005
- Channel NewsAsia live streaming on 3G in 2006
- DVBH broadcast (on mobile) public trial in 2008
- Channel 8 streaming on 3G for customers of SingTel in 2008
- *Today* newspaper, Channel NewsAsia and MeRadio (radio) applications across iPhone, Blackberry and Android platforms in 2009 and 2010

Our mobile-only series was relevant back in 2005/6 when telecompanies were fighting for mobile subscribers via among other things, exclusive content. However, the market dynamics changed when Singapore's mobile market became saturated.

Content providers like MediaCorp have also appreciated how our content has to reach our consumers across media platforms - TV on-air, digital TV, mobile and online. That's why we have made a conscious effort to distribute our content as widely as possible.

Our mobile apps do very well - we get about 20 million page views per month for all our mobile apps, while Channel NewsAsia online gets 30 million page views a month. Out of which eight million page views come

from the mobile app access – a staggering 27 percent. We are encouraged by this to launch new initiatives in the new media space.

Q. Singapore is a small country. How difficult is it to find talented staff for your various channels: on-air talent, writing talent, newsgathering talent, management talent?

Recruiting and retaining talented staff across all industries is always a challenge, and yes, Singapore's size means the talent pool is even more limited. We actively seek out and engage talent outside of Singapore; In Channel NewsAsia, we have employees from over 11 countries working together. More than a-third of our staff have been with us for at least 10 years.

Q. Channel NewsAsia International is one of the few Asian-owned English-language news channels. How difficult is it to compete with major international channels such as CNN and BBC World, which have greater resources?

From Day One, Channel NewsAsia has set out to be different. We wanted to be a news channel reporting from Asia, about Asia, reflecting Asian perspectives and bringing Asia closer to the rest of the world. Global news networks have much more resources at their disposal than us, but we believe that working with fewer resources has trained us to be nimble, flexible and creative in how we cover the news in the most relevant manner to our viewers in Asia.

We think we have done fairly well after a decade, but of course, there are areas we can improve on. We want to do better in our coverage of the Middle East, for example. There is so much interest in that region among our Asian viewers.

Q. How important is MediaCorp's role as a public service broadcaster? How do you see the future of public service broadcasting in Singapore?

MediaCorp started a radio service more than 70 years ago, before embarking on television broadcasting. We were government owned, and therefore served as a public broadcaster. Over the years, we have built up a diversified range of media, and became a privately-owned and commercially run media company.

However, we retain our national broadcaster role as the owner of all free-to-air TV channels in Singapore. While there are two other local radio stations in Singapore, we are dominant in reach by a wide margin. Our radio network therefore performs public broadcasting functions too. We view this public service role seriously, alongside our commercial operations, as we know only our TV and radio services could reach out to masses in an impactful, responsible manner.

Our public service obligations come in many forms, chief of which is producing and airing Public Service Broadcast (PSB) programmes to promote national interests. A portion of this is funded by the government through the Media Development Authority as these programmes are not commercially viable on their own. Funded programmes include current affairs, indo-education, culture, minority language and children's programmes.

Given the nature of PSB programmes the challenge is to ensure that they are entertaining yet, educational and informative. Most importantly, they must deliver the message intended. One of our recent PSB-funded programmes, 'The Little Nyonya', won numerous awards and was well-received in many countries.

Q. MediaCorp has entered into a number of financial and strategic relationships with companies in other Asian countries. What's the thinking behind this approach?

Our rationale behind forming the strategic relationships stem from our vision to be Asia's top media company. The size of the Singapore market is very

small, so there was a need for us to grow inorganically. Additionally, the ad expenditure in Singapore lags behind its GDP growth, so we needed to look beyond our current business model which is largely advertisement-based.

Q. MediaCorp operates a network of at least 12 radio stations. How important a role does radio play in Singaporeans' life?

MediaCorp operates 13 local FM radio stations which broadcast in 4 different languages to meet the listening needs of Singapore's population. Our radio stations serve different target audiences by providing audio entertainment as well as up-to-the-minute news and information, including traffic and weather information. In times of crises, radio in Singapore has a major role to play in terms of broadcasting the messages.

Radio remains one of the key media consumed by the general public – in Singapore, 92 percent of the Singapore population listen to any one of the 18 Singapore radio stations. It remains one of the few 'non-intrusive' media forms. Because it is non-intrusive and because it is easily available, radio becomes the key source for distributing timely content like up-to-date traffic news and emergency messages.

Trade and industry-wise, radio continues to be the most cost-effective advertising medium. Clients also often take advantage of radio's fast turnaround to bring their message to consumers. To the majority of advertisers, radio's ability to be everywhere allows them to maximise their ROI.

Q. MediaCorp also owns and runs the Singapore Media Academy. What is its role?

Given our experience, we have a good network of contacts and resources to provide industry-relevant and accredited training for media professionals; we also found that there were limited training avenues for our own staff, so Singapore Media Academy was established to offer world-class training, educational and consultancy services to the local and regional media companies. We hope to enhance the competencies of media professionals and our own staff through this academy.

Q. What's next for MediaCorp in terms of new services and new directions?

We are all seeing how digital technology is enabling the convergence of media. Look around and you will see people watching their videos on the go, reading their news on mobile; such devices are enabling people to watch what they want, when they want it.

MediaCorp is taking this digital revolution very seriously. As a content company, we want our programmes to be available and accessed as easily and seamlessly as possible. At the same time, we know content has to be tailored for the different screens - whether it's TV, mobile or PC. So we have started to re-invent the way we produce in the future. One of our recent innovations is creating a specialised 'MeRadio' application for iPhone users. This application is not just about allowing mobile users to listen to us while they're on the go; it has other features such as lyrics of songs being played, and social networking tools which are easy to use.

In Singapore, the Next Generation National Broadband Network (NGNBN) will facilitate very fast Internet access. The NGNBN therefore presents many opportunities for innovative ways to present interactive content to homes and businesses.

We are also looking at the 3D TV space, beginning with technical trials later this year. ●

KBS documentary wins Peabody Awards

'Noodle Road: Connecting the Kitchens', the fourth episode of KBS-Korea's acclaimed documentary series, was honoured at the 69th Annual Peabody Awards in May.

Directed by KBS producers Lee Wook Jung and Yeom Ji Sun, the six-part TV series has won awards in Korea and 10 other countries for its extensive and detailed coverage of the history of a basic staple food.

In making the documentary, sophisticated HD video graphics were used. It also featured BBC's renowned chef Ken Hom. He hosted the investigative series that traces the cultural and historical significance of the cuisine and its transformation and variation over the centuries.

Last year, the first part of the series 'Mysterious Food is Born', won the 'Best Documentary' in ABU Prizes by the ABU.

The award ceremony took place in New York.

The Peabody recognises achievement and meritorious public service by TV and radio stations, networks, cable-casters, webcasters, producing organisations and individuals.



KBS producers Yom Ji-Sun and Lee Wook-Jung



Winners with Horace Newcomb, Director of Peabody Awards

ABU, ITU, AIBD to foster IT initiatives

The ABU, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate on a number of initiatives related to the implementation of the Plan of Action of the World Summit for the Information Society and in supporting the flagship initiatives of the ITU to connect the world.

The areas the three organisations have agreed to work on include technical cooperation in developing tools, enhancing broadcasters' knowledge in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region and to assist them in the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, human resources development and capacity building activities; promotion of the role of broadcasting in disaster prevention, mitigation and relief, combating climate change and access to information and communication technologies in rural areas.

On top of that, there will also be joint activities on broadcasting frequency and coverage planning, promotion of new and emerging technologies for delivery of audiovisual content, and cooperation and promotion for 'Connect Asia Pacific'.

CBA appoints new Secretary General



Sally-Ann Wilson

The Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) has appointed Sally-Ann Wilson, Deputy Secretary-General of the CBA, as its new Secretary-General.

Ms Wilson is to succeed Elizabeth Smith. She will take up the role when Ms Smith leaves on 18 October.

Ms Wilson is currently Director of the WorldView project for the CBA. Before joining the CBA, her media career was in production, both radio and TV.

She has also had numerous roles as a broadcast executive for the BBC and in the commercial broadcasting sector.