

# Lot of mileage left in children's broadcasting, whatever critics say

January 25, 2008

Patricia Edgar and Barbara Biggins argued that the proposed ABC children's digital channel should be abandoned in favour of an "innovative multi-platform service" delivered by broadband ("Children's media: clean the slate and start again", January 22).

While they scoffed that the \$82 million requested for the ABC service would not go far, they did not hazard a guess as to the cost of their own even more fanciful, and certainly more risky, proposal. They would scrap everything that they and many others have fought for over the years in favour of broadcasters "relinquishing their programming role" for the broadband delivery of children's programs.

The notion that broadcast is dead, and that the best way to reach all Australia's children is broadband, is wrong. For the record, the children's channel proposal is a response to the outdated current model that deprives Australian families of locally made and publicly funded children's content.

It was developed by the Australian Children's Television Foundation after extensive research and expert guidance.

The vision is for a comprehensive, dedicated service for Australian children, featuring entertainment, drama, educational programs, news and current affairs, as well as programs that children have made themselves. It has won the support of many individuals in the education and community sectors, as well as those in the production sector. The funds requested are, indeed, modest. It will be necessary for organisations such as the ABC and the foundation and others to collaborate and share resources and infrastructure.

It is based on co-operation and goodwill, not self-interest.

At the end of the day, Edgar and Biggins just don't seem to want the ABC to get the money. They equate the concept of a "brand" with excessive commercialism. The "brand" is the way of marketing the destination - so that audiences will know you are there and will find you. It is naive to think that you could run a successful service in a crowded media environment without a brand.

All over the world, children are turning away from major free-to-air broadcasters to dedicated children's channels on pay television. These are predominantly commercial services from the US. In Europe, public broadcasters are responding with dedicated free-to-air children's channels. These public service channels provide a rich variety of programming, made specifically for children and scheduled appropriately. They appear on television and the internet and engage with their audiences in powerful ways - enabling children to participate and demonstrating that children appreciate local, culturally relevant programs made especially for them.

These channels are the future of home-grown, culturally relevant programs for children.

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