



How TV channels are selling themselves this Christmas

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Iain Macdonald, Associate Professor in the School of Arts and Creative Industries, looks at how television stations are branding themselves this festive season.

Date posted

 21 December 2016
15:24

Last updated

 14 June 2022

Television **might be** (<http://www.barb.co.uk/trendspotting/analysis/online-tv-viewing/>) rapidly migrating online but channels are fighting hard to stay relevant. Making the brand stand out, especially at Christmas, is still a big priority for broadcasters aiming to be part of our viewing decisions on whatever device we are

watching on. Spend any time on a channel and see the festive idents – the branding sequences between programmes – and this immediately becomes obvious.

So how best to do this? As Andy Bryant and Charlie Mawer of TV ident veterans Red Bee **put it** (<https://www.koganpage.com/product/the-tv-brand-builders-9780749476687#region>) recently, the key is for a channel to look fresh, maintain a distinctive personality and break the rules of what should come between programmes. BBC One, the UK's flagship channel **with about** (<http://www.barb.co.uk/trendspotting/analysis/share-by-channel-2/>) 22% of the total audience share, is a good example this year.

The channel has gone for a concept branded One-ness that feels very similar to how supermarkets or department stores are advertised – not surprising when the same creative team was **responsible** (<http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/worlds-creative-partnerships-john-lewis-adam-eve-ddb/1398507>) for TV advertising for the likes of department store John Lewis. The BBC One advert feels less about television and more a post-Brexit hug. Set to an indie-folk version of Merry Christmas Everyone, the one-minute film includes mixed-ethnicity couples and a **gay kiss** (<http://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/55947/sex-couple-share-kiss-bbc-ones-christmas-advert/>), following the path set earlier this year by **Lloyds Bank's** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siBRvC9YSc4>) same-sex proposal "For Your Next Step".



The whole approach is about creating an air of authenticity with vignettes of real life coming together at Christmas time. It's being used by advertisers around the world this festive season, though for retail not television channels – department store **David Jones** (<https://vimeo.com/190736076>) in Australia, for example, and Norwegian electronics chain **Elkjøp** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFAmiKo33s>)

ELKJØP – THE TEEN



Dragons and hashtags

In complete contrast is Sky 1. Sky 1 has a only fraction of BBC One's audience, **1% of** (<http://www.barb.co.uk/trendspotting/analysis/share-by-channel-2/>) the UK total. But it is backed by commercial leviathan BSkyB and plays a flagship role in the broadcaster's pay-TV offering – arguably the main threat to the BBC in the UK.

It is running a fairly generic **40-second round-up** (<https://youtu.be/5etMwhY7YOY>) of its Christmas highlights, branded "New. Unmissable. Exclusive." but also a separate advert dedicated to The Last Dragonslayer. This is the cinematic adaptation of **Jasper Fforde's book** (<http://www.jasperfforde.com/dragon/dragon.html>) that is the **centrepiece** (<https://corporate.sky.com/media-centre/news-page/2016/sky1-announces-brand-new-christmas-drama-the-last-dragonslayer>) of Sky's push to win the Christmas evening ratings.

Flanked by a logo "Sky 1 Presents", the advert uses snowy mountain ranges and a dragon's head to build excitement ahead of the premiere. It is an example of "day and date" marketing, **one of** (<https://www.koganpage.com/product/the-tv-brand-builders-9780749476687#region>) the biggest trends in global TV, and Sky clearly thinks it could have big audiences on its hands given the huge success of other fantasy dramas such as **Game of Thrones** (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0944947/>).

Sky 1 HD UK Christmas Advert 2016



This is about a collective family television experience with a second-screen commentary running in parallel on social media using the hashtag #SlayDay. It is part of a phenomenon that **began with** (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maya-grinberg/superbowl-2012-breaks-soc_b_1260869.html) the American Super Bowl in 2012, which rewrote the marketing strategies for television channels. Not to be outdone, BBC One has its own day and date event lined up for New Year's Day with **Sherlock** (<http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2016-12-06/when-does-the-new-series-of-sherlock-start-on-tv>).

Television personalities

The UK's other terrestrial channels are approaching Christmas in roughly the way you might expect, following the personality concept I mentioned earlier. So ITV is seeking to woo its older more family-oriented audience with idents that feel like a fancily packaged but familiar box of camp sweet-smelling soaps.

The strapline is, "All your favourite favourites, from our family to yours". There's a run-down of programmes backed by jingling bells and the Twelve Days of Christmas, and a subtler nod to inclusivity in the form of a black girl playing beside a Christmas tree.

ITV UK - Christmas Ident & Advert 2016 [King Of TV Sat]



Youth-leaning Channel 4 has parked its usual **avant garde idents** (<https://theconversation.com/why-channel-4s-new-branding-is-worthy-of-a-turner-prize-49162>) and gone for a film themed around a sharp postmodern Mrs Claus pulling up in her red sports car at C4HQ to help launch Christmas. Interestingly, this is a tie-in with retailer M&S, which used the same Mrs Claus in **its festive advert** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yK-Vv_q50sQ) (wearing M&S clothes, naturally).



BBC Two has repeated its recent trick of offsetting BBC One's high spending by **reprising** (<https://theident.gallery/bbc2-2015-xmas.php>) iconic idents from the last 25 years in a long run of make-and-mend nostalgia. BBC Four is **even more modest** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P9EfWd-28E>), placing a snowflake like a figleaf over the letter "o" in a suitably lo-fi way for its artier and more niche offering.

In short, you can tell a lot about a channel from what it does at Christmas, not to mention the state of a nation. It's not easy to be innovative – a bit like dusting down old baubles and Christmas decorations for your tree each year – but it's at least a reminder that there are different things on offer. If a programme gets

stale or you become restless between helpings of turkey and cake, be sure to remember where you left the remote control.

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This article was originally published on **The Conversation** (<http://theconversation.com>). Read the **original article** (<https://theconversation.com/how-tv-channels-are-selling-themselves-this-christmas-70543>).

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