



TRANSCRIPT Episode - TVsionary by MIP Markets - Brands as new entertainment players

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Welcome to Riviera Radio, the MIP Markets podcast platform. You're listening to TVisionary, a podcast where entertainment industry experts share their insights on the trends transforming the world of TV content.

Today's episode is about branded entertainment. Brands have been involved in the production of entertainment content for decades. But in the digital world the lines are getting blurred.

As brands look for new ways to reach out to customers, creating compelling branded content is more relevant than ever. But what does this mean for the entertainment industry?

We asked three leading industry executives to share their point of view and talk about their experience with branded entertainment.

In order of appearance, these experts are: Diego Ibáñez, Chief Brand Officer at DeAPlaneta Entertainment in Spain; Lasse Nikkari, Executive Producer for TV Formats & Branded Content at Sanoma in Finland; and Scott Greenberg, the head of Fox Entertainment's Blockchain Creative Labs in the US.

Let's hear what they have to say:

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TVisionary: The purpose of branded entertainment is to create new ways to grab the attention of viewers and get a brand's core messages and values across to them through storytelling. We asked our three experts their views on the status and the development of branded entertainment in the content industry today. Diego Ibáñez:

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Diego Ibáñez: If you look at the actual landscape, still, I think, the boundaries between people and screens are clear. So they are watching content in, let's say, a traditional way.

This is not so easy for branded content. For example, because you can't buy or you can't just link it to the purchase decision. It's emotional. It's storytelling. But I can't just simply go there to the TV and buy the product. It doesn't work that way.

So this is how it is today. But that's changing, fortunately, or unfortunately, because it's creating a lot of troubles for marketers and advertisers.

TVisionary: For Lasse Nikkari resorting to branded content is all about creating growth.

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Lasse Nikkari: Every customer brand nowadays, if they want to grow, and if they want to have sustainable growth, they need to do brand marketing. And branded entertainment shows are a very, very good venture to do that. That's where you are able to tell your story and tell your values for your customers, in the longer form as well. And the story and what [it]represents is a big part of every successful customer brand nowadays. Of course, it's a great opportunity if you are able to put yourself in the situation that you're part of great content, so then your message doesn't go unnoticed.

When your potential customers are visiting the fridge or social media during the ad breaks, when your story or your marketing becomes entertainment itself, I think then your audience is accepting [more] your messages as well.

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TVisionary: As for Scott Greenberg, he reminds us that brands are all about stories and have always been.

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Scott Greenberg: Becoming a brand means you've established a [sic] ecosystem. As long as you're telling great creative stories, and you're giving value to an audience, I think it's a good thing and I think the deeper the allure and the deeper the engagement, the better.

But the business is changing. It's hard to grab new eyeballs, so anything you can do to engage an audience and get there, it's great.

The LEGO Movie proves one of the funniest animated movies all times, and it was done right, by two great creators who did a great job.

Storytelling comes with good execution. And I watch the medium. I'm a huge believer in television. I love television. I love movies. And I think there's a huge opportunity for advertisers to be part of that, but our goal is to build franchises.

I hope my TV shows sell, make merch. To me that's just extending the storytelling experience. We go to Comic Con for our animated shows ... you see the fans want it, they want to be engaged with it.

The reason why we've got into the NFT business is that it's about a one-to-one relation with audiences and fan bases. It's about engaging, or activating audiences. If I had a toy ... and I just loved it so much, and what it was was all about, well, I want to see that movie. And why wouldn't I? I actually think it's a great thing. I think the more IP, the better.

At Fox we're in development with eOne. We've announced we're making 'Clue' as an animated show. Now that is a classic board game, it was a great movie, but we think there's a potentially to make an animated movie about that. We ran a TV show about that. We look at source material all the time, and at the end of the day, it's: Is there a story to tell?

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TVisionary: One thing is for sure, the quality and sophistication of branded content has evolved tremendously over time. Diego Ibáñez:

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DB: This is something that I love from the very beginning of my professional career because I've been seeing how brands have tried to find a way of getting to the heart of of consumers.

In the beginning, you remember in the '70s, there were things like Procter & Gamble sponsorship soap operas [on] CBS, and that was lovely - it was so simple, it was so special. And then that all the way along until, for example, BMW with all these high-quality series produced with Clive Owen and directors like Guy Ritchie. It's a long way, but it's based on the same thing. It's about the target group. How is the language that you communicate to the audience, and where do you place that advertising. It's all about the eyeballs.

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TVisionary: So branded entertainment is nothing new, but there certainly seems to be more of it being produced these days, says Lasse Nikkari:

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Lasse Nikkari: I think there is an increase now happening. As far as I'm concerned in Finland, we've done more branded entertainment than ever before. So, I guess it goes to show that it's been around.

Maybe it's [been] ten years since it started to be a topic in Cannes that brands are part of the content, more and more, but I think it has evolved and matured and there [are] now good cases. For certain brands, it's also not a trophy, but they're seeing, they're understanding the upside of having their own television show.

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TVisionary: Can branded entertainment go too far? How do you weave brand presence into entertainment content in a smart way so that audiences don't find it too invasive or clumsy. Here's what these three industry content experts believe is the right way to go:

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TVisionary: For Scott Greenberg, it's not about too much or too little brand presence, it's just a matter of getting it right.

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SG: Good entertainment is good entertainment. I don't think we should knock brands when they're given the space, as long as they do it the right way. I think audiences are pretty sophisticated and smart. If it's good, it's good. If it's not, it's not. It doesn't really matter where it comes from and you cannot fake a good audience.

You want great characters to tell great stories. You want the right tools for the right storyteller to tell good stories and you can make good stuff.

Our job is to get the right people to the table to do it the justice that in our minds what it should be. But, yeah, we're always looking for great IP that has some history to go do that. That's the great thing we do in entertaining people.

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TVisionary: Diego Ibáñez is even more positive about the rise and evolution of branded entertainment today.

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DG: What is coming is great. All challenges are great. We have an opportunity which is [to] target concrete niches, or concrete target groups. For example, let's take Facebook and TikTok. We are producing brands and producing content for both, but they are completely different in the language because they are completely different - the people that are accessing those social networks.

Facebook [is] for older people. Older people like me are more based on text, for example. We want to read. But young kids, Generation Alpha, they don't care about reading; they are more about the video. So TikTok is for them. If I want to sell a product to Generation Alpha, I have to go to TikTok for a decision. And, second, the content I produce has to be video and music. And, straight away, it has to be [sic] impact; it has to be whatever is good for them.

TVisionary: Lassie Nikkari agrees. Generally today branded content is getting better, he says:

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LN: We're seeing more quality production as well because the knowledge of the broadcasters and the knowledge of the brands [is] increasing all the time. And we are developing ways to do this better and also we're getting more and more examples, benchmarks, [of] how a brand should be written into the content in order to make a quality branded entertainment show.

The brand's exposure and role still needs to be subtle, so it doesn't dilute the content. But I'm sure that when we are doing more and more of these, all this develops as well, and the brand starts to understand, okay, we need to be subtle - these are the messages that we can convey in this type of content.

The biggest benchmark for the Finnish industry, so far, has been 'Love It or List It', which is a renovation real estate show. In Finland, we're a small market, but the show's ready-made. We're getting a lot of attraction from the audience but for [a] long [time] the show itself was way too expensive to produce in a viable way, so it absolutely is a business for the broadcaster. When I started, I attached three commercial partners to the show - everyone having exposure within the format, and we were able to bring the long-awaited show for our audiences and it was a great success.

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TVisionary: For Diego Ibáñez, brands need content that conveys their values to more and more discerning audiences.

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DI: I think we are buying better, more informed. I think that content is key for establishing a relation and an emotional relation with consumers. I think that that's always good. I think you are selling me your values. It's very good that you can communicate what I am, what is my product. I can also set an education point of view on the product that I do. I can set even social consciousness with my content. I think that that's good and anyway even if I thought it is not good, it's not going to stop! It's going to happen. So we have to take the positive and just adapt to it.

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TVisionary: The financial aspect is of course the main reason behind the invention of branded entertainment, but can working with brands actually make TV content better? And, also, how is digitization changing the landscape in this field like in so many others? There are challenges here but many opportunities, too, our experts say:

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TVisionary: Lassie Nikkari is convinced that working with brands can improve the quality of TV content, in addition to making it more commercially viable.

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LN: I truly believe that certain formats and certain content is better to be done with a suitable brand, for example. And for us, when you're able to do things with brands, [and] you're able to build sustainable, good business cases, it's a great advantage for us and we're able to better the local content, what the Finnish audience needs. And we all know how hard and strong the competition is now, among the traditional broadcasters versus the global streamers coming to our markets.

We have taken the branded entertainment as [a] core thing of our content strategy, so we tried to push more, we tried to get the performance that we might have not been able to do before, to build our competitive advantage versus the streamers. And with those shows we are able to improve our content slate and make shows that are viable and profitable for us.

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TVisionary: For Diego Ibáñez, digitization has brought us to a turning point that is changing the way brands and content creators can work together.

DG: Definitely we are right now - and I want to say that maybe I'm being very strong[ly] opinionated in this - in a moment similar to when in 2000 everything changed because of the Internet, because the rise of Web3 is changing completely all the paradigms.

In the sense that Web3 is providing something that we have been dreaming of for a lot of time, which is living another life or is being part or making, which is more important, the on-line or the digital life at the same time as the physical life. This is what the metaverse is about. That's very important for brands because we can be contextual or be buying those products contextually with what we are doing in real time.

[There are] not any more boundaries between screens and people. It's all happening at the same time. So I think that's a completely different set-up for content production for brands. It has to be settled within the place where I am, the moment where I am, and it's happening at the same time that I'm doing something in my normal life.

Let's take for example Nike. I'm running. I am accessing content from Nike and maybe accessing that fantastic application. I'm creating this content and uploading that, and I can maybe decide in that moment to buy something online.

Who are the producers now? I mean that's another important factor that is affecting the way that brands are producing content. It's not any more about the big, big producer and the community of viewers. Right now consumers are producing their own content. It's all about an economy of creators and it's all about doing my stuff as a person, and I can just form part of the brand and create content, getting all this different content created by different people and [to shape] the branded content.

Producers have to adapt to that, and instead of making everything by themselves to explore new possibilities in which you give space and voice to the community to create stuff and content that goes with the brand values. So it's completely different.

The financing is coming with this. [There are] not as many people that are distributing content like I am. It's not any more like it was; broadcasters don't have the budget that they had. Now you have to think about how to spread your financing plan [across] many different platforms. So, this goes well with consumers producing, too. It's not just as simple, but it's much more challenging and very exciting because you get your clients participating with it.

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TVisionary: Not to mention, says Lassie Nikkari, that for the TV industry, working hand in hand with brands on making content together can create a new type of relationship.

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LN: One of the added bonuses, or opportunities or advantages, of a branded entertainment show is that when you start to do that with your client, you will have weekly meetings with regard to the content.

You get very close and personal with their marketing team, and that's a great opportunity to build trust between you and your commercial partners. You get to know them way better because you suddenly have an increased amount of different meetings with them, and you talk about certain things with regard to the show and you try to facilitate their hopes the best way possible. But that's the added bonus - you build trust with your commercial partners differently than [by] just selling advertising space or media.

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TVisionary: It's a fact that brands are everywhere. The trick is putting together a coherent ecosystem that works for everyone, viewers included, says Diego Ibáñez.

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DI: We are always relating to brands. Even there are content brands like Warner, and 'stranger' [brands like] SpongeBob or Miraculous Ladybug, or even Nike or Adidas, we are linked to brands all the time. So we have to find a way, marketers have to find a way, to gather all this fragmented creator content and make it happen, and create an ecosystem that really works. That's the exciting opportunity that the industry has in the future.

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TVisionary: And that wraps up our episode of TVisionary on branded entertainment as it stands today.

We want to thank Diego Ibáñez, Lassie Nikkari and Scott Greenberg for their participation and, of course, thank you for listening.

Feel free to check out the other episodes of the TVisionary podcasts on Riviera Radio.