



makes you think

TVO Today: Using Technology to Build Community

Remarks by Lisa de Wilde
Chief Executive Officer, TVO

The Combined Probus Club of North Oakville
Oakville, Ontario

Thursday January 8, 2009

(Check against delivery)

This morning, I'd like to tell you about how TVO is playing its part in creating meaningful citizen engagement in our province.

I have always loved a challenge. So when the Ontario Government asked me, three short years ago, to bring new direction and focus to its educational network, I said "yes!" enthusiastically.

It was a chance to strengthen something that was close to people's hearts in Ontario and certainly to mine.

Why change a good thing? Because the media landscape was, and is, changing rapidly. So TVO needed to become more relevant, in its programming and in its delivery.

I am pleased to be here this morning to share with you the story of how we are transforming TVO.

People think of TVO as a well-respected, traditional TV broadcaster. But they might also think we have limited potential for innovation and growth -- because of our small budget, our educational mandate and our regional scope.

But that's not the reality of TVO today -- at all!

TVO today is a nimble media organization. We're investing in innovation and taking risks in order to boost the impact of our unique content in a borderless digital world.

TVO comes to you with a unique promise: as our button says, "TVO Makes You Think".

We create programs that make kids think in a way that's fun, relevant and interactive.

We get parents thinking about how they can play a more effective role in their children's education.

In fact, right across Ontario we're making people of all ages think. Think about our communities, our economy, our society - and the more active role each of us can play in shaping all of these things.

This morning, I want to tell you about TVO's commitment to informing, inspiring and engaging the people of our province. And how, today, we're so much more than just a broadcaster.

TVOKids

Let's start with kids. TVO is recognized for its educational programs for young children. We enhance their abilities with learning opportunities that are safe, commercial-free, uninterrupted and most important, trusted.

In *Gisèle's Big Backyard*, we equip early learners with the crucial literacy and numeracy skills they'll need to be successful when they start school. And we reinforce those skills year-round.

At the same time, they're having so much fun, they don't even realize they're learning!

For school-age kids age 6-10, TVO is the only place on TV that comes to them live and interactive every day after school. And when they go online, their learning continues - thanks to more than 160 curriculum-based Web games and activities on our TVOKids.com web site.

TVO does indeed make kids think – and the research backs up this claim.

For example, Professor Janette Pelletier of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education conducted a family literacy study using TVO programming. It revealed that children whose families watch *TVOKids* are more successful readers earlier in school than those who don't watch it.

And a recent study funded by the US Department of Education found that kids who viewed one of our co-productions, *Word World*, were able to recognize and read words that they were not able to read before. This gives pre-schoolers a tremendous advantage as they prepare for classroom learning.

The American Library Association includes TVOKids.com as one of their Great Web Sites for Kids.

And each month our site gets close to 300,000 unique visitors, and over 4 million page views.

Everything we produce for kids is developed with educators, and starts with a clear learning objective from the Ontario school curriculum. We do ask kids to work harder when they watch *TVOKids* or play on TVOKids.com. They deliver. And it's what makes us different.

TVOPARENTS.COM

And what about their parents, the people who trust TVO as a safe place for their children?

One of our priorities is to equip Ontario's parents to play a more active role in their kids' education.

In fact, parents can now log on to a resource unavailable anywhere else in the world. TVOParents.com, our newest web community, offers in-depth answers to parents' questions about how their kids learn, grow and behave.

And for those parents new to Canada, we have an online guide – in 19 languages – to help navigate the Ontario school system.

I referred to TVOParents.com as a web community a moment ago. Because that's what we see our role as: creating community.

We're not just a provider of educational media. Rather, we're actively bringing people together – to share ideas and to inspire each other. We provide the platform and the stimulus.

But it's our audience – the people of Ontario – who are helping to shape the discussions on TVOParents.com. It's very much a two-way conversation.

One of the most distinctive features of TVOParents.com is the TVO-produced web program *Your Voice*.

Why create a show primarily for the internet? Two reasons. First, greater interactivity with our audience. Online, our viewers can ask a question directly to one of our experts, or share a tip with other parents.

And two, busy parents are increasingly turning to the internet for information, or to share their views.

And what has the reaction been to TVParents.com?

This comment from a parent fairly well sums up the feedback we're getting: "this website is fabulous and much needed in Ontario and Canada!!"

ADULTS

For our adult viewers, we make them think with programs they can't get anywhere else. Many of them we produce ourselves -- like *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, *Allan Gregg in Conversation* and *Big Ideas*.

With *The Agenda*, we took something we did well - current affairs - and created a new format that allowed for greater depth and analysis.

The Agenda with Steve Paikin respects the intelligence of its audience, and the importance of the subject matters it explores.

Here's what one viewer had to say recently after watching a debate about the possibility of a coalition government in Ottawa: "what a delightful surprise – intelligent guests, political balance, respect for opposing views, decorum, and a host unconcerned with scoring "gotcha" points."

Former New Brunswick Premier Frank McKenna, after viewing our much-discussed *Agenda* broadcast with columnist Mark Steyn last summer, declared the show to be "extraordinarily provocative, educational and informative."

I believe *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* is one of the most incisive daily current affairs programs in the world. And I'm pretty proud of it!

It draws an average audience of 100,000 viewers a night. This is small compared to Canadian Idol, but not for current affairs, and certainly not for a show that's distinct in the market.

And, *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* attracts a larger audience than any other information programming in its timeslot.

In the same vein, our *Big Ideas* series presents smart university-style lectures. It draws a relatively modest TV audience. But it's consistently one of the top educational podcasts on Apple's iTunes. Not just in Ontario, or in Canada. But around the world.

In fact, our programs are finding a whole new audience online. Last year, Podcast downloads of TVO programs totaled over four million.

To put this figure in perspective, just over two years ago, we had no podcasts at all. Our numbers get better every month, and people are accessing our content from around the world.

TVO also presents high-quality dramatic programs, such as the *The Choir*, which aired last month, and the multi-award winning British drama *The Street*, currently airing on TVO.

Or this month's North American premiere of an acclaimed adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. These outstanding series show us the joys and tragedies of everyday life, even though two have contemporary settings, and the other is a timeless classic.

These are shows that do more than tell a good story – although they certainly do that. Like everything we offer at TVO, they provide new perspectives on our world. And they make us think.

The same goes for *Saturday Night at the Movies*, the longest running movie program in the world.

Each week, *Saturday Night at the Movies* presents uninterrupted feature films and exclusive interviews based on a thought-provoking theme. And these are films that are rarely seen on other networks. I promise you, watching movies and interviews on TVO has never been more engaging.

TVO commissions and co-produces another kind of film: outstanding documentaries. In fact, we're recognized as a leader in the industry.

We embrace the power of documentaries to tell powerful, often very personal, stories.

This Sunday, for example, I invite you to watch the premier of *Forgetful Not Forgotten*, about a son who chronicles his father's deterioration due to early-onset Alzheimer's. The son, you see, is also the filmmaker.

As I said, this is both powerful and personal – and very inspiring.

Forgetful Not Forgotten is part of *Mysteries of the Mind*, a week-long exploration into the workings of the brain that begins this Sunday.

Hosted by author and researcher Dr. Norman Doidge from the University of Toronto's Department of Psychiatry, *Mysteries of the Mind* is a powerful example of how effectively TVO can tackle complex subject matter - and make it thoroughly engaging.

And after all, this is home base for TVO: stimulating people's minds is what we do best.

RATIONALE FOR BEING

Why do we take this approach?

We do this because our mandate is to help Ontarians become more engaged in our world, and to become more active citizens. In doing this, we help build a stronger, more cohesive society.

When people watch TVO, on television or on the web, action follows. In whatever way is meaningful to them, people engage in a more informed, more intelligent way in some aspect of our society. And we all – as individuals, or as a province - benefit from a more engaged citizenry.

That's why, for example, we partner with initiatives like *Get Involved*. Get Involved.ca is a social network that helps connect people who want to give back to their communities.

I'm sure many of you here today are involved in volunteer work, or fund raising activities.

And I'm also certain there are many more people who wish they too could do more for their community. But where to start?

Get Involved.ca, that's where. And to increase awareness of this initiative, TVO is airing a series of documentary shorts that profile some fascinating people who are making a difference for the better.

THE DOUBLE BOTTOM LINE

Everything we do at TVO is measured against a double bottom line -- we are focused on creating positive social impact and on measuring our return on investment. For me numbers aren't everything, but they are part of the equation.

To this end, TVO does a good job of competing for viewers' attention. We maintain a 2% audience share in prime time, on par with specialty networks like the Family Channel and History Television.

CONTENT PROVIDER

But we're not only about television anymore. To be sure, our broadcast component continues to be a powerful way for us to reach Ontarians.

But over the last couple of years, TVO has made a strategic shift, from pure TV station to multi-platform educational media organization.

This shift to the interactive world of online communities expands our scope, and allows us to connect with our audience in a way that was never before possible.

Some people call it the socially engaged Web. Let me give you an example of what that means for TVO.

This season, we've been taking *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* on the road around Ontario. Our aim is to explore Ontario's different regional economies: things like the manufacturing sector, our resource-based industries, the agricultural sector and high-tech.

And by explore, we mean in great depth: what are the causes of the huge challenges these sectors are facing today? What lies ahead? What is the social impact of changing economic times?

Last fall we broadcast live from Windsor and Sault Ste. Marie. In the audience were representatives from different levels of government, business and labour leaders, non-profit organizations, and ordinary citizens.

And the day before these live broadcasts, many of the same people were active participants in a new and unique forum. It's called AgendaCamp. And it's enabled by TVO.

I say "enabled" because that's what we're doing: providing a platform for people to come together and share ideas and solutions to pressing economic issues.

If you attend one of these AgendaCamps in person, you'll see a group of engaged citizens first deciding what topics they want to explore, then breaking off into separate groups to discuss and debate those same issues.

It's true community engagement, and something I'm very proud of.

This community, I should add, extends well beyond the meeting rooms. At AgendaCamp, participants take pictures, shoot video, or write blogs about what they're experiencing.

This content then goes onto The Agenda's web site, and forms a kind of online community resource, commonly known as a "wiki". This way, the conversations keep going, and more Ontarians – no matter where they live – can get involved.

One participant posted this thought about her AgendaCamp experience: "(I discovered) how dynamic a conversation can be when several individuals have intelligent, insightful, and interesting things to say, especially when all have the desire to achieve a common goal of community improvement."

In short, think of AgendaCamp as using technology to build community.

GOING DIGITAL

And it's technology - digital technology – that's transforming TVO. Just as it's transforming so many aspects of our lives.

Over the last couple of years we've rebuilt our studios to a fully digital High-Definition-ready production facility. We will soon have a state-of-the-art Digital Workflow that is tapeless, enabling easy repurposing of our content for different platforms.

This is more than just an equipment upgrade. Digital technology is changing everything. It changes the way we create, manage and distribute our content.

PARTNERSHIPS

Also fundamental to our Content and Revenue strategies is our ability to create partnerships. Today, Vale Inco sponsors *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*; EatRight Ontario and the Egg Farmers of Ontario sponsor the *TVOKids Don't Sit Still Tour*; and TD Insurance Meloche Monnex underwrites the *Big Ideas Best Lecturer Competition*.

We also partner with academia and the arts. We work with the University of Toronto's Munk Centre, with York University, with the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Ontario Science Centre, to name a few.

All with the aim of creating new ways of bringing their content to ours.

But it's not just new partnerships that we seek. It's new kinds of partnerships. Partnerships that focus on innovation, and expanding our reach.

For example, last spring we signed our first strategic distribution alliance with Yahoo! Canada.

Yahoo! is distributing TVO's educational content for parents on their web site, which opens up access to an audience of millions! And, I'm happy to report, our videos are among the most popular on Yahoo's lifestyle page.

And very soon, TVO will have a dedicated channel on YouTube.

These are the places where a small media organization like TVO can make an even greater impact with its content, and build a whole new audience.

INNOVATION

Partnerships like these are also enabling us to become more innovative and adaptable. They encourage us to look at what we do in new ways.

They inspire us to develop new skills to meet new challenges. And when you give talented people like we have at TVO the tools and training to succeed in the world of digital media, great things can happen – and they are!

We're creating an environment at TVO where a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship pervades.

THE DIGITAL PROMISE

This is all a good start.

But we can do more. We need to stay at the forefront of the new digital world.

Just recently, *The Globe and Mail's* online media columnist Mathew Ingram blogged about the conceptual challenges that newspapers face when they make the transition from paper-based to the internet. He wrote, "there are no limits any more, or at least not the usual ones that have worked for the past century or so. And that's a difficult thing to grasp."

Traditional broadcasters face the same kinds of challenges.

But with our small size and funding model, TVO is actually positioned to be more nimble; to be able to test and deploy innovative ideas quickly; and to have the luxury of time to invest in new business models.

This all comes together to confirm for me that TVO is well-positioned to leverage the digital promise.

VALUE FOR MONEY

So how much does this all cost? Our budget this year is just over \$50 million. Of this, \$40 million comes from the Ontario Government, and we generate the other \$10 million through donations, sponsorships, and through new business models. These self-generated dollars are essential to our business model.

To put it a different way, TVO costs each person in Ontario \$3 a year from our taxes. That's less than the cost of renting one movie! I believe that's good value.

At TVO, we have never had a big budget. But we use creativity, innovation and commitment in its place. And moving forward, we're committed to investing in innovative ideas that will increase our self-generated revenues.

CONCLUSION

I came here this morning to tell you the story of TVO today. Now I'm asking you to help take that story farther.

How? By joining the growing community of committed friends of TVO – engaged citizens such as yourselves who share our vision.

What can you do? A lot. And it's easy.

You can take a new look at our content, and tell a friend about something interesting you saw or read.

You can learn how the newest trends in education are impacting your grandchildren's classroom by signing up for our *TVOParents* newsletter.

You can make a donation – the brochures that we will hand out afterwards will show you how easy this is.

And you can sign up for my newsletter updates – just leave your email address on our sign up sheet.

I hope I have made you think about the role of educational media in our lives, and the importance of TVO in fulfilling that role. But I also hope you'll join me in making even more people think about TVO.

Thank you.