

My 2¢

Small TV trade shows aid small TV distributors because they're ignored by large companies. Large TV markets help small exhibitors because big companies attract more buyers.



Lately, *VideoAge* has been inundated with press releases announcing the attendance of TV distribution companies at small TV trade shows. And these regional markets are cropping up all over the world, like *Jornadas* in Argentina, *TEPAL* in Panama, *Andina Link* in Colombia, *ATF* in Singapore, the *New Europe Market* in Croatia, *My Content Dubai* in the UAE, the *Ukrainian Content Market*, and *DISCOP* in Turkey and South Africa, just to name a few.

Plus there are the specialized markets such as *Hot Docs* in Toronto, *Tokyo Docs*, *Sportel* in Monte Carlo and Rio, and *KidScreen* in New York.

In the past, the proliferation of TV markets was a source of aggravation for many distribution executives, who complained of added expenses and too much time away from the office. Today, it seems that these issues are no longer problematic and the more smaller markets, the merrier.

It is possible that the change in distributors' attitude reflects the changing business environment, which is now dominated by studios and mini-majors. And since the latter tend to focus only on large TV trade shows like *MIPCOM*, the *L.A. Screenings*, *NATPE* and *MIP-TV*, mid-size distribution companies are finding that smaller TV trade shows are the only way to stay a step ahead of the big distribution companies.

It all started in Budapest, after the collapse of Central and Eastern Europe's Communist regimes. The *DISCOP* market catered to buyers in emerging territories, who couldn't afford to attend the *MIPs* or the *Screenings*, or buy from large companies. So, *DISCOP* attracted small and mid-size distribution companies, especially from Latin America, that were more than happy to sell their series for a handful of dollars (here, sell is more appropriate than license since programs were often delivered on DVDs without any dubbing). The good news was that those dollars, multiplied by the large number of episodes, times the number of countries, added up to serious money.

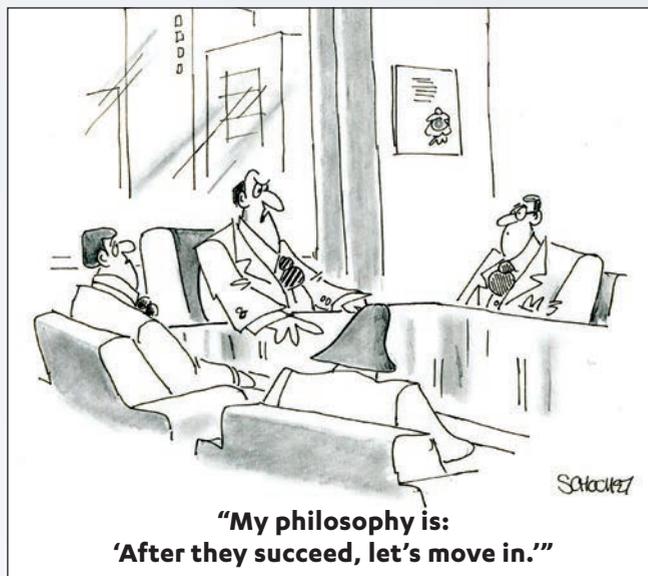
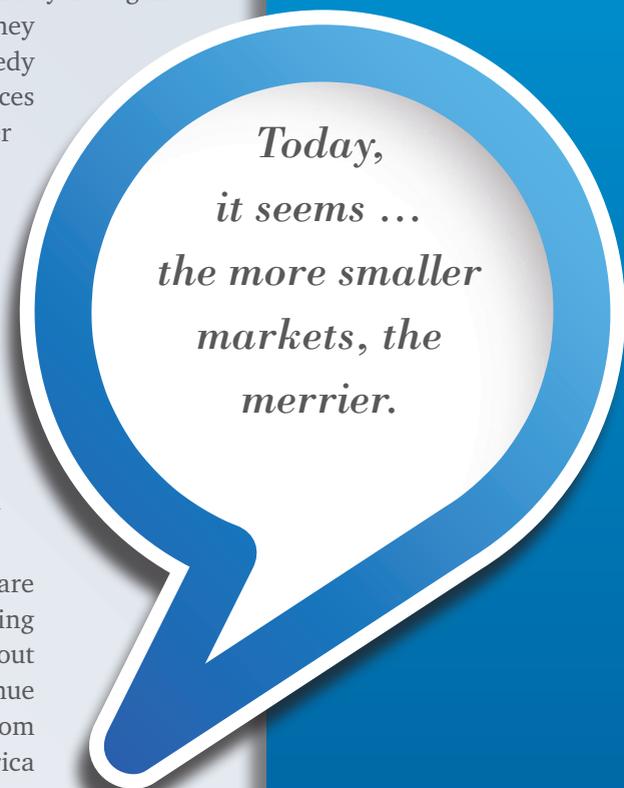
With the Central and Eastern European countries maturing and prospering, TV buyers progressed to mini-major and studio fare, paying higher prices and shunning the type of programming that put them on the TV map in the first place.

In the mid-1990s, when Eastern European buyers began timidly attending the *L.A. Screenings*, they could only afford accommodations in seedy hotels somewhere in Hollywood, in places even our expert Los Angeles messenger service could not find in order to deliver *VideoAge's* *L.A. Screenings Guide*. Today, the same buyers can be found at mostly deluxe five-star hotels.

So now, as far as emerging markets are concerned, only Africa, the Middle East and Asia remain. Yet, Asian program buyers tend to prefer traveling to Western TV markets rather than attending trade shows in their own backyards.

Large studios and mini-majors are traditionally impatient with emerging markets and some even complain about their revenue share from Latin America representing just eight to 10 percent of total sales. But as soon as markets mature above the two percent level they enter them with all the power they can muster, thus marginalizing the previous smaller suppliers, which in turn have to resort to new territories in need of cheap but commercially viable programming.

Over the years, looking at this process through the trade media lens, one cannot help but notice not only the resilience and sales survival skills of small distribution companies, but also how the tide has turned. In the past, large companies paved the way for smaller companies to feast on a large number of buyers — imagine a lion leaving some of the prey for scavengers. Today, the smaller companies are helping to create a market for large companies to enter as soon as the TV outlets become prosperous — imagine catfish (and other “cleaner fish”) that keep other fish clean and thus more appetizing for predators. In effect, small distributors help the television ecosystem both in emerging and mature markets, creating diversity by allowing smaller players to enter the TV business.



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