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From: Carol Ferreira [REDACTED]
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To: Consultations
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Local Television: A Reflection of Us

Reality television. We don't even bother to point out or challenge this misnomer anymore. It has become an official type of television programming which, because it puts cameras inside people's homes and films them continuously, supposedly catching "ordinary, every day things", it is meant to show us something real, something "true" and "genuine". Yet, as we know, there is very little truth and much ~~botex~~ script behind what has become the more popular reality television programmes, most of which gives us glimpses of the lives of the rich and unexplainably famous. If at any point there was any intention to humanise the subjects, to let everyday folks see that "they are just like us", that has all but evaporated. Those who watch do so in wait of the drama, of the blow up, of the inevitable emotional car crash that will captivate for maybe sixty seconds but will be drawn out in heavily lucrative two hour specials, followed by the extra-special spin offs and the "live" dialogues where the cast get to "duke it out" unscripted.

This is not reality.

Trying to argue the merits of *reality television* is futile and unnecessary- as consumers we have the weapon of choice, so each of us gets to choose accordingly. However, the phenomenon of reality television and its global appeal point to the very need for and importance of high quality, effective, thought provoking local television programming.

Local television will never be able to compete with the Kardashians, and that is not what it is intended to do. Local television programming is aimed at putting us in touch with our reality, with all it's beauty, heartache, frustration, dismay, triumph and loss. Local television is supposed to be a reflection of our community in all its glorious contradictions.

Our local television requirements need to be revamped, not removed, so the question should not be if there needs to be a requirement for television providers to have a local television channel but rather what that channel(s) should actually "look like".

As a starting point, local television must be independent and impartial, no matter whom that offends. This means that, while Government Television serves a purpose, it cannot be the end all and be all of local television. It also means that "differing" "minority" and at times even "unpopular" opinions and subject matter that are well thought out, delivered and have merit should find a place within local television.

We need to more clearly define the content of local tv so that it is of value to different sectors of our community, not a specific group or even the majority. Programming needs to include social, cultural, educational, historical, public service and entertainment components, as well as accountability building endeavours such as news reporting, political debate, political commentary and political satire. Simply running adverts on the local attractions or footage of Seven Mile Beach is not enough. Similarly, simply showing footage of the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly without any additional supporting information (re-caps, highlights, etc) and impartial (but hopefully thought provoking) commentary or analysis is also of little service to the viewer.

If such programming is to be effective, then setting a quality standard is absolutely necessary. This will be tricky, especially because to many "quality standard" is sometimes misunderstood to mean "censorship" and determining that which "should" or "should not" be given airtime because of the nature of the topics proposed. Quality standards should refer to a number of components, ranging from meeting the aforementioned content requirements to clarity of message to production value, and should be determined by key stakeholders from different sectors of the community who are already using the services that are currently provided.

It is difficult to determine how many hours local programming should be shown per day, but in considering the needs of the local population 6-8 hours daily (of which at least half is new), on weekdays, between the hours of 6-9am and 6-9pm, and perhaps up to 12 hours (of which at least 1-2 hours is new) on weekends, seems to be a good place to start.


If local television is to actually be and remain local, and also be accessible to young people interested in communication and media, then the great majority of the production should be locally produced. Let it be known that there are tremendously talented, creative, professional and enthusiastic filmmakers in Cayman who can deliver top quality material independently of budget constraints. Not "top quality *for Cayman*" but "top quality" period.

This leads us to the question of funding: who should pay for all of this? Given the fact that there are five television service providers, and this is clearly not a "not for profit" venture, one can only assume that even with such high competition the demand is sufficient that the companies are turning a profit for providing this service. The most cost effective way, which will like ensure the viability and accessibility of local television, is to have a designated fee that providers pay annually to offset the cost of the service (with some stipulations geared specifically towards subsidising educational and community oriented programming).

In determining the fees, some consideration needs to be given to live streaming options. While local television should be made available over the air so as to ensure its availability to all presently, we must look to stay ahead of the curve and ensure that at least local content is available online in real time (as well as easily accessible after the fact).

Local television will always have a role to play in the way that we inform, educate, challenge and entertain ourselves. When done correctly, local television programming helps us to take an analytical look at our society and to better understand the dynamics within which we live and work.

In a country like Cayman, where the fear of driving away foreign investment or tourists is often used as a reason to keep problems (and heads) buried in the sand, the media is tasked with enormous responsibility to keep us informed. Taking away any one source from the limited number we have available is to shoot ourselves in the foot and wonder why it hurts.

Submission made by: Carolina M. Ferreira, 

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"One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws" Martin Luther King Jr.