President’s Message

A Symphony of Change

I have a friend who’s an accomplished pianist; she’s played for audiences across the world. Now, she teaches at a university. Last May, I asked what she was going to do when the semester ended. Her response surprised me: She was going to spend the summer working on one piece of classical music. She said spending that amount of time with a single piece of music gave her new insights.

That conversation came back to me when I was thinking about this year’s Conference. In some respects, our music is the same from year to year – we are working with the businesses of television, radio and cable. The difference is that the score is changing. It wasn’t so long ago that we had three broadcast networks and a plethora of small-to-medium sized television, radio, cable and programming ownership groups. Everyone was trying to reach the same demographic – males 25-54. Women’s products were promoted in “soap operas.” To reach kids, advertisers ran in Saturday morning cartoons. Radio didn’t do much to target women or children, cable took whatever it could get, and nobody talked about ethnic audiences.

Recent research shows African Americans now represent about 12 percent of U.S. households, women are involved in more than 50 percent of big-ticket purchase decisions, Asian Americans control a disproportionate amount of the country’s wealth, and Hispanics are the fastest growing minority in the U.S. Technology such as satellite radio, on-demand television, and DVRs like TiVo have changed the advertising landscape forever.

This year’s general session speakers recognized the opportunities in these changes and embraced them. Catherine Liggins Hughes is BCFM’s 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award Winner. She is the founder and chairperson of Radio One Inc., the largest African American owned and operated broadcast company in the nation, with 69 stations in 22 markets. Radio One boasts the first woman-owned radio station to rank No. 1 in a major market. The company also is a partner in TV One, a cable channel targeting African American adults. Hughes promises attendees insights on the value of going against the conventional wisdom about women and African Americans.

Marshall N. Morton will be recognized as 2005 CFO of the Year at this year’s Conference. Morton has been CFO of Media General, a communications company with interests in newspapers, broadcast television stations, and interactive media since 1989. On July 1, 2005, he will become president and CEO of the company. Conference attendees can expect insights on what it takes to move out of the finance department and into the office of the CEO in today’s media companies.

Dave Kennedy is another speaker who can provide attendees insights on breaking the mold. This year’s Avatar Award winner was recently promoted to the office of the president and CEO of Susquehanna Media, a diversified communications company with operations in radio broadcasting and cable television. Kennedy’s career includes a number of positions on the radio side of the business, a career which began as a staff announcer for Susquehanna Radio in Toledo, Ohio.

Laureen Ong, National Geographic Channel’s president, didn’t just break the mold, she smashed it to bits. Conventional wisdom says an Asian American who began her career as a traffic manager would never become president of one of cable’s most successfully launched new networks. Ong says she “always wanted to be a pioneer.” She’s challenged both gender and racial stereotypes first as the only Asian American woman in sports franchise management and then as the first and only Asian American woman to lead a top-10 television market affiliate. What she learned along the way will provide new insights for all Conference attendees.

Other general sessions include a presentation by Andrew Ward, vice president, strategic alliances for Comcast Spotlight and a panel titled, “Multicultural Programming is Good Bu-iness.” Ward’s presentation is timely and should provide some fascinating insights, particularly in light of a recent New York Times article that cites Comcast as an example of a media company that has leveraged on-demand television to provide new opportunities for advertisers. The panel on multicultural programming featuring experts in Asian, Hispanic, and African American media and marketing will give attendees insights into how both new and established media companies are making money by responding our country’s changing demographics.
Just as my pianist friend finds new insights when she spends time with a single piece of music, I guarantee you will never look at our businesses in the same way after you spend time with these and other speakers in New Orleans.

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