

EARLY 'RECIPE' REVEALS TV'S DARKER SIDE

SPONSOR MEDDLING AMONG COMPLAINTS

TV shows from the late 1940s and the early 1950s, when the programs were produced by advertising agencies on behalf of their clients and were broadcast live, make up a large portion of what has been referred to as the "Golden Age of Television." Let's not forget, however, not every program was a gem.

That reality was clearly top of mind for Mrs. A. Scott Bullitt, president of King Broadcasting Co. in Seattle, when she delivered this "recipe for an aver-



Viewers of "Kraft Television Theatre" could send away to Kraft for recipe books.

age TV program" before a group of educators and TV industry managers in 1952 (as reported in J. Fred MacDonald's 1990 book "One Nation Under Television"):

Recipe for an Average TV Program

- 1 cup of Sponsor's Requirements—sift gently
 - 2 tablespoons of Agency Ideas, carefully chilled
 - Add ½-dozen Staff Suggestions, well-beaten.
- However fresh and flavorful, they will curdle when combined with Agency Ideas, so they must be beaten until stiff.
- Stir together in a smoke-filled room and sprinkle generously with Salesmen's Gimmicks.
- Cover the mixture with a tight lid so that no Imagination can get in and no Gimmicks can get out, and let stand while the costs increase.
- 1 jigger of Talent, domestic will do.
- Flavor with:
- Production Problems
 - A pinch of Doubt
- And, if you have any, a dash of Hope
- Fold ingredients carefully together so they can get into a small studio. This requires a very light touch as the slightest jolt will sour the results.
- Line the pan with Union Regulations—otherwise the mixture will stick.
- Place in oven with your fingers crossed.
- Sometimes it comes out a tasty delicacy, and, sometimes, it's just cooked. ●



A J. Walter Thompson ad from 1955 shows how a product test can translate to television.

MODEL

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show was a popular hit.

In 1930, JWT had produced the first commercial TV broadcast anywhere for its Libby's food client on W9XAP, an experimental TV station in Chicago, and the agency produced another show a few years later on an experimental TV station in New York.

In May 1946, JWT and Standard Brands decided the time was right to see what this new medium, TV, could do. It approached NBC and decided to sponsor a variety show called "The Hour Glass Show."

Airing for 15 minutes on Sundays and an hour on Thursday nights, it was a grand experiment, as all sorts of techniques—as well as various content mixes and lengths of commercials—were tested. After 10 months and an outlay between \$200,000 and \$250,000, Standard Brands pulled the plug on the show, deciding it had learned enough about TV for the moment, and it would wait for a much bigger audience to use the new medium.

Executives at JWT particularly liked the short dramatic skits that were shown on "Hour Glass," not least because they received positive viewer mail. The executives became convinced that an hourlong anthology drama series would be viable, and they pitched the idea to John Platt, vice president and advertising manager of Kraft in Chicago.

"Kraft appropriated \$3,000 per week for time and talent," recalled Ed Rice, the JWT ad executive working in its TV department who wrote many of the early scripts for



"Kraft Television Theatre" as well as the commercials that appeared on the show. (Mr. Rice's comments are from an internal JWT memo in the JWT archives housed at the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History at Duke University. It is not known whether he was related to Robert Rice, who wrote the early TV story for The New Yorker.)

"The entire operation was experimental," Ed Rice continued. "It was certainly not economical for Kraft to spend \$3,000 in order to reach a potential audience of [relatively few people.] The National Broadcasting Co., which charged a nominal fee of

\$100 per hour for time on the air, could hardly pay for the electricity consumed for that money. The Thompson company's 15% commission certainly did not cover the time of staff of all the people involved. Literary rights to the plays used were obtained for \$50 per week, actors were paid \$75 for the leading roles and \$50 for all others. Everyone concerned was working because they believed in the future of television."

Mr. Rice went on to praise Kraft's ad manager, John

Platt. "Mr. Platt of Kraft decided that the real way to test this new medium was to use it to advertise a product which was advertised in no other way. And so he picked McLaren's Imperial Cheese, a product which not only had no advertising appropriation whatsoever, but had not even been distributed for several years.

"The power of television was evident

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The models whose faces were not shown—only their hands—in hundreds of TV ads for Kraft.



When opportunities

for your brand are limitless...