

Changing the channel on traditional TV marketing

By [Candy Dempers](#), issued by [MediaHeads 360](#)

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In a crowded media space, advertisers have to do the hard yards to grab hold of viewers' attention.



One need only see your children or younger work colleagues' flick through their mobile device loaded with apps, to know we are in an attention deficit market. Marketers must continuously think outside of the box to generate impactful campaigns.

Advertiser-funded programming (AFP) is a unique way that is starting to gain more traction. TV-led, this branch of marketing presents a solution to the intersection of creative advertising and engaging content. What it does is simple: it sets out to transform the viewer experience, with brands embedded into the narrative of popular programming.

It's not just about product placement or brand mentions. It's about creating a storyline where the brand's identity acts as a secret protagonist. This is a significant, underutilised tool for advertisers to craft content and execute ideas that resonate in new and interesting ways.

What is Advertiser-Funded Programming?

Advertiser Funded Programming (AFP) is a marketing strategy where brands fund content production partially or wholly, typically as an alternative to traditional promotion.

This form of marketing gained traction worldwide when video on demand (VOD) and personal video recorders (PVRs) were introduced, allowing viewers to skip through scheduled advertisements and leaving platforms with a conundrum to give brands the same or better ROI.

There are numerous models to play with. The "domestic" model - for instance, involves a brand contributing a proportion of the production costs, usually anywhere from 30 to 100%.

A key nuance to grasp here: sponsoring a program and branded content is one approach, but AFT funds content partially or wholly with a view towards the long term. The brand effectively becomes the backbone of the content, with room to collaborate with producers to engage its target audience.

Direct Impact

Where traditional television advertising has the possibility of falling into the dreaded "spray and pray" category at times,

AFP offers a paradigm shift in the opportunity it creates for brands to connect directly with audiences.

Done well, the marketing avenue presents a storytelling revolution, bringing brands into the homes and hearts of viewers like never before. Brands ingrain themselves within the narratives of popular shows, leading to innovation possibilities within their digital strategies, too.

AFP allows products to inhabit a natural context within the show's environment. A seamless integration is easy to spot: it enhances the viewer experience and removes the often disruptive nature of more conventional advertising (especially prevalent on social media platforms).

Top-level benefits of AFP

There are numerous top-level benefits of Advertiser Funded Programming (AFP), each of which is integral for brands to keep in mind when exploring this branch of marketing.

Trust by association

By integrating into a program's editorial fabric, brands can align themselves with the show's values and inherit its established audience trust and loyalty. Specific characters that people love "endorsing" a brand's message - even in unscripted formats like judges, hosts or celebrity guest appearances - are a great way to uncover additional value without a direct thrust aimed at the viewer.

In some ways, this approach emulates the precise nature of how pay-per-click campaigns target their viewers. The core difference is that the brand taps into a particular audience segment more naturally, grabbing the full attention of a viewer engaged in a program they have chosen to watch, rather than trying to catch someone in while in the YouTube rabbit hole.

A direct investment into quality content

Advertisers contribute directly to the production budget when they sign an AFP deal. The investment, in turn, boosts the chances of higher-quality programming.

The cash injection should not, however, make editorial influence the brand's top priority. Instead, marketers must figure out how to embed themselves alongside the creative team in telling a story to engage audiences nationwide, ultimately with enhanced visibility and impact.

Content ownership possibilities

Depending on the agreement, advertisers can request a stake in content ownership. A more significant stake in its success can be lucrative but may result in a level of control that shifts the dynamic between production and the brand.

The golden rule: Always draw clear distinctions between ownership and creative control, regardless of the splits. Legal agreements are essential so everyone stays on the same page.

Rights and distribution deals

It's also worth mentioning that negotiating AFP deals creates a possibility of addressing rights to licence and distributing the content, creating new post-airing profit-sharing opportunities.

The same golden rule from earlier applies, to keep the relationship between the show and its funder happy in the long-term.

Additional promotional opportunities

Additional marketing avenues created from AFP deals extend to in-store experiences and promotions, strengthening

consumer connection.

Product placement is typically worked into the agreement too, but brands must be careful not to fall into the hard-sell domain. They're paying for a soft landing, after all.

A (thriving) South African example

MediaHeads 360 recently partnered with Trace Studios to produce the 9th season of 'The Ultimate Braai Master,' a popular local cooking show boasting 8 million viewers as of 2022. A distribution deal with Netflix has meant an explosion of viewers - making it even more of a household name - with no signs of slowing down.

The program offers exciting AFP-led campaign possibilities, creating a dynamic stage for brands to display their unique identity, connect genuinely with viewers, and enhance brand awareness.

The agency is also pursuing additional opportunities for its clients to tap into AFP opportunities with local television properties. Additional agreements are in place for extended exposure across the E-Media network and on social media, sweetening the pot for brands looking to amplify what they're doing outside of more traditional avenues.

Elevated television advertising has landed

Advertiser-Funded Programming transcends the conventional, inviting brands to be part of and drive the story.

It offers a dynamic, multi-dimensional platform to captivate and retain consumer attention in a way traditional advertising continues to struggle to do in a fast-changing world.

The future of television advertising is here.

AFP has yet to mature fully in South Africa, so there is innovation potential aplenty. Hop on board now, or you may end up watching regretfully from the sidelines.

ABOUT CANDY DEMPERS

Candy Dempers has loved all things media for twenty-three years. A sales and marketing specialist, her first love was radio and bringing brands and platforms together.

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