

# creative thinking in the new TV landscape – Creative Review

## Brands, not channels: creative thinking in the new TV landscape

The past few months have seen a number of major broadcasters rebrand, from Netflix to Channel 4, MTV and, most recently, Channel 5. In this feature from our forthcoming March issue, Aporva Baxi looks at how the TV landscape is changing – and the challenges and opportunities this presents for creatives and broadcasters

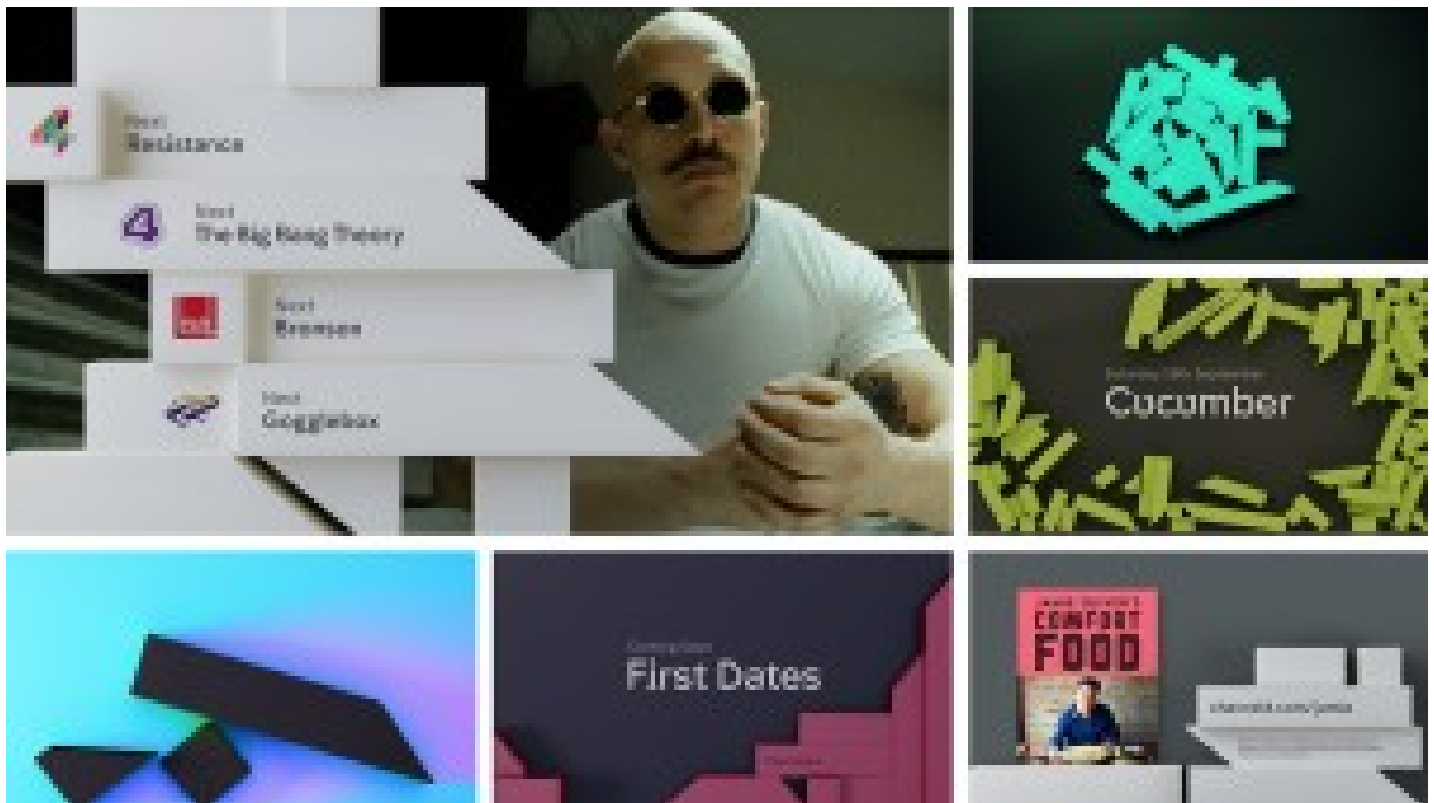


Once upon a time, if the glowing box in the living room was on, you had a good chance of knowing what the people on the sofa would be watching. What was on the telly last night was discussed in playgrounds and workplaces across the country, we'd gather round the corner set and the national grid would register the moment people turned the kettle on in the ad break. Viewing habits were predictable, homogenous and controlled by just a few parameters.

No longer. TV is no longer defined and differentiated by its broadcast platform. Technology and changing habits have uncoupled TV from the domestic space and it is just one content provider amongst many. And as other service and content providers crossover into multi-platform models, television has to re-position and distinguish itself in this crowded context. TV is changing. With that comes challenges – but also huge opportunities. Here's a ten point plan to make the most of what's happening.



Channel 4's new brand identity, designed in-house, features a custom typeface by Neville Brody and bold, expressive idents by Jonathan Glazer – resulting in a more joined up look for the brand. Lead image (top): Gretel's slick branding for Netflix



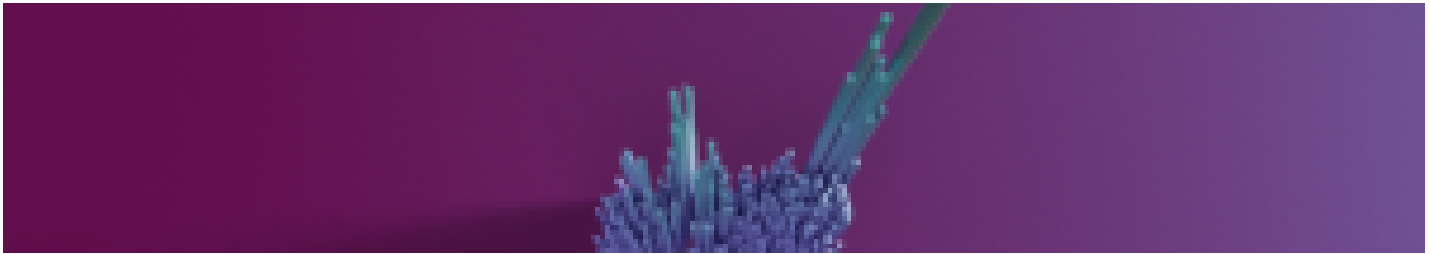
Channel 4's new look also sees its logo broken down into segments, which can be re-arranged to create a range of on-screen graphics

### 1. Do the strategic heavy lifting

Rather than just thinking of ways to funnel their content through other media channels, **TV companies must reimagine themselves as multi-channel brands**. This requires them to re-think the essentials of brand and strategy on a grander scale. Some of this thinking has already begun to take shape through services like ITV Hub, Channel 4's All 4 and Sky Q. Notable exceptions aside, the industry can still go a long way in re-imagining and evolving the broadcast model. And that makes for a huge opportunity for broadcasters, content makers and creatives.

### 2. Remember: everything has changed, and it's competitive out there

There are literally thousands of channels the world over. **Many are part of larger networks like Sony, NBC Universal and Viacom**. Flagship general entertainment channels in each country are typically surrounded by younger, niche, genre channels. This makes for a turbulent sea of brands all vying for attention in a very noisy world.



Channel 5's new visual identity, launched last week, also sees its logo broken down into segments which can be animated and filled using different colours and textures



New logos have been created for each channel in the 5 family, ensuring a more consistent identity across the network

### 3. But content is still king

With the TV renaissance in full flow, content is still king. Disruptive new kids on the block, Netflix, Amazon and Hulu are following rapidly in the footsteps of HBO, who are known for creating high quality original content – not to

mention the raft of US, Scandinavian, French and UK companies creating world-class shows, raising the bar on content delivery and shifting audience expectations of the broadcast model.

#### 4. Remember to think local

Global channels have the additional challenge of working across cultures and demographic groups, while being entertaining, credible and relevant locally. This can fragment the brand: local teams on the ground may deliver successfully for their local audience, but are not always joined up across the territories by a single brand purpose that builds toward **a bigger brand story**.

#### 5. Think brand. Not channel

TV has seen brand strategy take a back seat to talent, programming and ratings targets driving strategic choices. The broadcaster of the future will no longer be able to afford take such a siloed approach to decision making. **Instead, operational and content choices will have to flow from a central, cohesive and powerful brand ethos that cuts across all content, platforms and territories.**



#### 6. There's a big opportunity for brands to leverage design

While channels have made inroads in developing new services such as 'Catch-up' and 'On-Demand', there has been **little development or innovation in the way a channel is fundamentally designed and put together.**

The on-air ident has been at the heart of television branding for decades. When done well, they can be watched again and again and loved by the audience creating a distinct brand expression. Take BBC2 and Channel 4's long enduring series and their latest highly abstract, but gloriously ambitious 'origin story' idents. But equally, in the wider context of a channel brand in today's multi-platform paradigm, idents have become incidental, tactical elements of what should now be a more comprehensive brand system approach.

As an example, think about how gesture and movement have changed the way we interact in digital environments.

These principles can be integrated into the broadcast brand vernacular to create a new design language that crosses boundaries.

New York agency Gretel's global rebrand for Netflix makes clever use of a highly effective device called 'the stack' to brand content and help users navigate it, creating a system that works seamlessly on and off-air. Image courtesy of Gretel/Netflix

## 7. Bridge the gap between digital and TV with tactile user interfaces

The touch and flick UI design of mobile apps has created a new and **familiar language**. This is having an effect on the look and feel of channels where UI design is a perfect fit for the menus, end pages and signposting systems that make up a channel. This clearly bridges the gap between TV and digital in a more seamless way.

We've used this as one point of inspiration for the 'Dashboard' in our brand work for Eurosport. A consideration for us was a platform neutral experience that still **feels intelligent and emotive**. Another is the recent global rebrand for Netflix by US agency Gretel, which utilises a highly simple but effective device they call 'The Stack' to brand and navigate content. Its design is entirely built on the notion of creating a system that works for print, digital and on-air, and like our 'Dashboard', it has a built in 'behaviour' that is very much part of the brand expression. However, **this approach needs to be human and emotive rather than being fed by clever algorithms that can lack personality**.

DixonBaxi's dashboard style device for Eurosport applies UI design principles to on-air menus, with the aim of creating a 'platform neutral' experience

## 8. Know what you want to say to the world

We often ask our clients, **'if there were no shows, what would the channel say about the world?'** This is more relevant now than ever if channel brands want to perform seamlessly across different platforms. An example of this is one of our current projects for Telemundo, the US Spanish-language network, asking how the brand is relevant to a growing and influential Hispanic American audience. We're thinking about how we articulate that so it's not just an entertainment brand, but one that considers its role in a wider cultural context to transcend stereotypes and empower a nation. **9. And say it clearly: speak directly to the viewer** Successful channels tend to deploy **unapologetic, bold language to speak directly to the viewer**. Channels like Comedy Central and BT Sport invite conversation and in the case of **MTV's 2015 rebrand**, **hand parts of the channel over to the audience to let them shape it**. As a result, they feel much more social, live and in the moment. Tone of voice is becoming more prominent and is an intrinsic part of how the brand connects with viewers across the multitude of social platforms.



MTV's new branding makes use of user-generated content, making the channel feel more social and 'in the moment'

MTV's 'bump' feature lets viewers upload short pieces of content online to be broadcast on the channel in between shows

## 10. Don't forget the basics!

**Know your customer.** The challenge for broadcasters is to first get to know their audiences in a way that they have traditionally never done before. Networks need to understand their audience, not just as passive television viewers but as individuals that have hundreds of choices and need to be engaged and inspired by smart, authentic companies that are unafraid to experiment. Never more so for millennials and the next generation to come. They need to understand how their channel(s) fit into people's lives to better engage them. Often, this has to go beyond a rebrand exercise and can involve wholesale business transformation.

AMC has been making great use of social media to promote zombie survival thriller *The Walking Dead* (images via *The Walking Dead* on Facebook)

Thankfully, there's more and more ways to add value to the viewing experience, to make it feel more immersive, relevant and curated. Sporting brands are using augmented reality and data to build layers of insight (a great example of the medium fitting the message and the audience) and networks like AMC are inspiring *Walking Dead* fans by continuing the story between seasons through games, graphic novels and social campaigns. Apple TV and Sky Q, meanwhile, are creating new intuitive viewing platforms that are reaching towards the future of TV. Because ultimately, that's who it is all for. It's about the audience, not what screen they are on. Instead of asking what device are they on, ask: what is the audience doing? What's driving them? What do they want? If the content or brand is relevant, how does it fit into their lifestyle? Everything should come from this. And if the brand, the content and the look provides an engaging, delightful experience, then audiences will connect with that brand. There's a lot of good work to be done: and there's no better time for TV

*Aporva Baxi is co-founder and executive creative director of creative agency [DixonBaxi](#). This article also appears*

*in the March issue of CR, out next week, which is a film and TV special.*

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