



THE BROADCAST IMAGE GROUP

2010: Return the Passion to Your Product

Larry Rickel, President and CEO of the Broadcast Image Group, contributed these responses for succeeding in 2010:

1. To set the scene, what would be the headline or theme for 2010 and why?

Return the PASSION to your product. 2010 is going to be a year of opportunity.

A year of evolution from what we've known as the traditional ways of collecting, producing and reporting. A year where we must understand that our customers have changed and we must evolve our organization's culture to reflect this opportunity.

2010 must be a year when we reconnect with our customers.

Too often we run on parallel tracks with our customers. What we think is important to report and what they are interested in knowing more about don't intersect with enough frequency to make our newscasts "must see television" in a world where they'd rather use "news time" to watch something they've recorded on their DVRs.

In a time when, more and more, news and information seekers sip, dip and bathe in news and information all day long, and no longer rely on television newscasts to find out what happened during the day, we must understand how to service these "anytime, anywhere" customers on our Evolving Media platforms. Reacting to news and reporting in traditional television news time periods is no longer enough. We must anticipate coverage expectations and over-deliver to recruit a new generation of raving fans on air, online and on the go.

It's clear that as more and more important news "finds people" on alternative platforms, local stations must recommit to being necessities in people's lives. When stations harvest and deliver "enterprise" content with genuine value, they are motivating people to watch.

We must recommit to cultivating "raving fans. We must give potential viewers specific reasons to drive across town and CHOOSE our newscasts in all dayparts regardless of our current competitive position.

2. What do you see as the biggest challenge facing local news executives in 2010? The biggest opportunity in the coming year?

The biggest challenge and biggest opportunity are both about developing a new news coverage culture and retraining your staffs to understand how their jobs must evolve to meet these needs in a world where "important news finds your viewers well before most of your newscasts air."

You must reformulate how you do business --- from how you conduct your news planning meetings, to how reporters and producers construct stories, to how anchors share stories.

Everyone on your team must embrace and understand that your "anytime, anywhere" customers won't tune into your local newscast just for **news events** anymore. Their expectations are now all about the **impact and effects** these news events will have on their families, their jobs, and their lives, delivered with context, perspective and points of view forecasting where each story is going.

Your customers want your newscasts to become a 360 experience. They want to participate. They don't want you to tell "AT" them or even "TO" them. They want you to engage them in a dialogue about what's going on that's important. They want to "join the conversation" on every platform. Turn your storytellers into "story sharers." This means you must commit to developing your team's social media skills as an integrated part of your daily news planning, gathering and presentation.

You must understand and redesign each newscast daypart based on customer expectations for that daypart. Your morning news, your evening news, your late newscasts can still be the tent poles of your news brand, but they cannot be the only dimensions that define who you are, what you stand for and how you service them when they want news and information all the time.

3. From a revenue standpoint, what do you see in store for local stations in the next 6 or 12 months? If there is some sort of modest economic recovery, how should stations approach re-building? What do you recommend in terms of coming up with a plan to spend wisely, should additional revenues become available in the next year?

Don't think about going back. Our business model has changed. Instead of focusing on "getting back to where we were," we must focus on where we need to go to prove we can be relevant to a new generation of news customers. Our efforts should be focused on building a news culture that's centered on what's most important to our customers based on the time of day, while challenging and pruning many of the traditional assumptions we've relied on in the past.

This is an opportunity to sift through to the important stuff, refine your brand and focus what you produce to consistently and authentically deliver quality content.

Here is an example of what I'm talking about:

Commit to delivering customer-focused enterprise stories all year round on a regular schedule to set an expectation that you deliver valuable "only on" enterprise content whenever viewers tune-in. The time has passed when you can turn on the topical promotion machine just before a book and expect any dramatic results. Don't forget to produce the stories "around" the important news and enterprise stories, because if you bring samplers into your newscast with this coverage and the stories "around" these enterprise stories are "empty" or unimportant, you will reinforce old stereotypes and dilute the impact of your enterprise coverage.

Having said that, I do believe if you are smart in your selection year-round, by establishing a "value" expectation with your enterprise stories, that you can move the numbers on a specific newscast, especially in meter and people meter markets, on any given day.

In this evolving media environment, commit to delivering a compelling combination of valuable customer-focused content promoted creatively with specific content promises.

If you integrate this "enterprise culture," elevating stories beyond events to the impact and effect of stories into your daily news development systems, then this content is not "extra" work for anyone, rather it's a critical component to building your news brand every day. And remember, often the most effective promotable stories are enterprise elements on "day-of" breaking or high interest news stories.

When you make smart content selections inside your brand, then these stories will not only encourage sampling and increased frequency, they will also improve the quality of your daily newscasts.

4. As you survey markets around the country, what is the most important thing on each platform that stations should fix right now? Are there mistakes being made that you commonly see from market to market?

You must understand platform use: How people use each platform and then craft content to match. On Television, Online, On The Go.

Television Newscasts-At Home: Build this platform around **people and personality**. Commit to sharing compelling people-focused stories that evoke emotion. Use your story sharers to engage your customers in a meaningful conversation about where the news is going and how it affects their lives. Your customers' values have not changed, just their context and time-frame expectations. It's still about sharing important stories through meaningful story sharing, delivered by authentic personalities, and showcased to deliver memorable moments.

Prioritize newscasts and be sure everyone on your team knows which newscasts are your most important as it's impossible to put equal weight in every daypart.

Online-At Work: Avoid using your website as a simple marketing tool. It must be a **"real-time" source** of important and interesting (and sometimes off beat) news and information.

Understand how your customers use social networking platforms. Example: Look at Facebook like we used to look at radio and other outside media resources.

Commit to hyper local, hyper specific coverage on the web. Examples: Weather Microsites like those launched by the Post-Newsweek stations, Hyper Local Community & Neighborhood sites like those launched by the Fisher Stations, hyper-specific sites like the recently rumored TMZsports.com.

Retool your Search Pages so they reflect the rich content of Bing, rather than Google's basic search results.

Train your team to understand how to prepare online information, text, graphics and video to maximize Search Engine Optimization.

Mobile-On The Go: Leverage this platform to your brand advantage. Example: Use tools like Twitter as your mobile breaking news feed to keep your customers informed on the go. This can be your most effective tool to push your "here's what's going on right now" brand values.

5. Which platform is the most important to concentrate your efforts on in the coming year? How important do you believe mobile will be to the future of news and information producers, such as local television news operations?

As we discussed [in a Rundown article just a couple of months ago](#), I believe mobile should explode in 2010.

People live with their phones from the time they get up to the moment they fall asleep. They never turn it off. It is their constant companion. It is the one piece of technology, thanks to the iPhone, that everyone, no matter the demo, has embraced as their **"right now" news distribution tool**.

Every day, just as your team considers story treatment for television and online, they must consider the "real-time" opportunities on mobile --- from alerts, to real time information in Text and Video, to using mobile devices to cover and broadcast news live.

In 2010 local stations must also commit to "Local Mobile Search" a content tool that mobile users seek and can be a huge local revenue source.

When Apple does announce their Mobile Tablet, possibly as soon as late January, this multi-media tool will throw additional accelerant on the mobile space and your station must be ready. This new tool will generate a whole new world of mobile opportunity for all media --- TV, Newspaper and Magazines --- in much the same way the iPhone changed the way people get information from their mobile phones in the last couple of years.

6. Some stations have postponed doing research during the economic crisis. For those that haven't been in the field with a research project in some time, what is the most important thing to look at first?

Understand that your sedentary news viewer has changed to become the anytime, anywhere news and information consumer who demands news right now no matter where they are on the most convenient the platform available to them at that moment, while also understanding how your newscasts must change for your brand to grow and recruit new customers.

Dig deeper into research-driven priority content areas so you can separate your coverage. (Examples: Breaking News, Crime Coverage, Education Coverage, Family Safety and Weather). Don't be satisfied with just your traditional tracking questions in these content areas.

In your national research, have you seen areas where there has been a dramatic change in audience attitudes or use of media over the last 18 months to 2 years?

--- Customer habits about the way they get their news and use TV is dramatically changing.

--- Know where you stand with your evolving customers. Is your brand still of value to them? Do your current points of distinction match your customers' evolving interests?

--- Viewers want News without Borders. Local news, now more than ever is defined by news that is important to me and my family no matter where it happens. Understand that viewers no longer define local news as just what happens in their local communities, rather it's news that local people are interested in.

--- Understand and investigate innovative ways to reach these more disparate news customers' needs and expectations.

--- I'd also say that this is the best time for stations to focus resources on morning news. It's where stations can control their own destiny with smart programming and thoughtful marketing. It's the daypart where the demos are still growing and there are still opportunities for news expansion. It's where there is the most potential to grow ratings and revenue. It's also going to be a strong daypart with lots of demand and lots of avails as we head into a political year in 2010. Time spent watching morning news has dramatically increased. Morning news is no longer about 15 minute wheels as most morning news viewers consume news between 45 minutes and one hour --- about the amount of time it takes to get your kids up and ready for school. In many markets, especially with aggressive Fox stations, the time watched is even longer.

--- Important News Finds You. Understanding the Anytime, Anywhere Customer and that they already know the important news events before the newscasts come on.

--- Personalities are still VERY important in your newscasts and are your most important tool to influence the emotion of your brand. Know your talent recruiters. Use them to sell your brand values.

The Broadcast Image Group: Action Agenda 2010

Become an EVOLVING MEDIA organization. Jump on the idea of opening conversations with your customers to make your product better. Commit to delivering meaningful content on every platform to engage your customers to "join the conversation." Use them to crowd source, develop content, participate in story sharing. Launch Real-time Interactive Chatrooms during your live newscasts to enable your viewers who are, with greater frequency, watching TV with their computers in their laps, to participate in your program.

Remember your people are your greatest asset --- your point of distinction. How they "share" stories with authenticity, enthusiasm, excitement, intimacy and transparency is critical to how you separate yourself in the context of sharing important relevant stories (not events) that keep pushing content forward. Remember: Relevant Content + Compelling Personalities + Meaningful Showcasing = Memorable Story Sharing.

Conduct a Content and Personality audit. Carefully evaluate your assets and liabilities. Move forward with a more concentrated brand that includes showcasing only your high-impact personalities and most important content that you want to be known for.

When you recruit, be sure all new hires understand the importance of being a multimedia story sharer. There will be little room in the newsroom of the future for one dimensional people.

Be Your Best Every Day in Every Newscast. You can't take any newscasts off. Lead with Focus, Relentless Consistency, and Accountability.

Maximize Sampling Opportunities by being the Best Planners (Big Story Coverage, Enterprise Story Coverage, Event Coverage - Super Bowl, Olympics, Elections)

Take one customer-centered calculated risk every day to grow your brand. Remember, if you're not reinventing your product every day, someone else is, and you risk becoming irrelevant.

Commit to Evolving Systems, Training, Coaching and Tools to grow your Story Sharing and News Media Skills

Develop new disciplines and new job descriptions. Expect everyone to grow, learn and execute. Example: Commit to an On TV, Online, On the Go platform strategy to shape your morning and afternoon meeting systems to manage content throughout the day.

Turn your staff into trainers and coaches. It's impossible for one person or even a leaner management team to stay on top of everything. Create training beats to educate and share.

Assign staff to podcasts, webchannels, mobile sites, airchecks, and cable programming - Share, learn, and innovate. Resist the temptation to copy. Be sure whatever you weave inside your brand enhances, and does not dilute, your brand.

Invest in training on evolving media tools Examples: Live Reporting via Skype and iPhones.

Work Backwards from your Goals. As you reconstruct how you establish your new work flow and goals, first ask yourself, "what's the goal?" then, work the project and systems backwards from your end goal to develop systems that work.

Be a leader who inspires, not a manager who manipulates. Example: Rather than diving into an "everyone does everything" plan. Every day, work back from the content you want to report and ask yourself: "Is this a 2 legged story or a 4 legged story?" - Can one person research, report, shoot and edit this story or do I need a team to best tell this story? Make your decision based on CONTENT, not some rigid, inflexible culture. If it makes sense in your market, consider coverage partnerships, such as sharing choppers or generic news event coverage.

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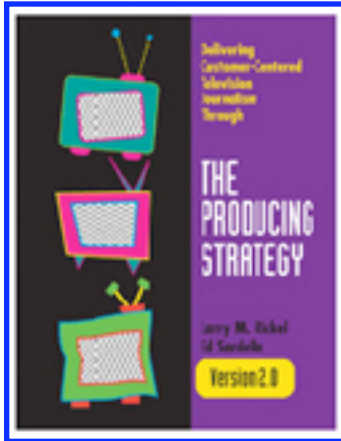
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**Don't Get Distracted:
Stay Focused on Your Core Product**



This is a valuable newsroom resource.

Delivering viewer-centered information is the focus of The Producing Strategy, Version 2.0, by veteran consultant Larry Rickel and longtime successful anchor Ed Sardella.

Their premise: everyone in the newsroom is a producer. We must all be involved in strong storytelling and making the newscast a special experience for the viewer.

Don't abandon your power base while upgrading your new media, says Rickel. As broadcasters move onto new platforms, it is more important than ever to stay focused on the role the TV newscast plays in your four-screen strategy.