

THE WORLD'S LARGEST TV STUDIO

TOP VALUE TELEVISION —OVERVIEW

Top Value Television (TVTV) began in early 1972 as an Ant Farm/Raindance fantasy project to cover the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. It became a reality in April, '72 when the project received full press accreditation. The people who worked on the tape were chosen because of certain video skills, organizational skills and/or equipment which they could provide. For the Democratic Convention there were 28 of us; four from Raindance, four from Ant Farm, four from Antioch, Ohio, three Videofreex, and independent video people from New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

Funding came from small foundations, individual donors, and four cable systems (Teleprompter, Sterling Manhattan, Cypress Communications, and Continental CableVision) to whom the tape was pre-sold. Although the cable systems provided only 25% of the funding, the precedent of selling programming to cable stations was established. The agreement made with cable systems was that the program would be finished within 2 weeks after the end of the convention and the systems could view the tape and choose whether or not to air it. In essence, we felt we were doing some programming R&D for cable systems.

All of our footage was shot on 1/2" Sony portapaks and then edited on Sony 1". We have the capability of distributing on 1/2", 1", 2" or cassette.

After the Democratic edit we were able to sell the tape to a UHF station in Chicago (Channel 44), and to approach more cable systems with a finished program in hand.

We found that tooling up for the second (Republican) convention went a lot more smoothly. First of all we had learned how to save money. The Democrat edit cost \$12,000; the second was budgeted at \$8,500. Again money came from similar sources. We had fewer people, less tape and a firmer outline of which stories to pursue.

The Republican edit was also done on 1" and was ready two weeks after the convention. The need now is to establish firmer distribution channels; to sell the tape to more cable systems, additional UHF stations and colleges. Monies generated from sales will go towards personal debts assumed and

deferred on equipment rental and salaries to those who worked on Top Value Television.

INSTRUCTIONS TO TVTV CREW:

THINGS TO TAPE: No way we can compete with the networks. Their resources are astounding.

Our tape will be about us trying to tape the Convention and have it make sense as tape; behind-the-scenes encounters between people; and a different aesthetic approach to the events that the networks will also be covering (e.g. inside the Hall itself). In addition, we'll cover official outside activities (e.g. the Democratic Telethon, parties) and ad hoc ones (e.g. demonstrations).

Specifically, we want tape of:

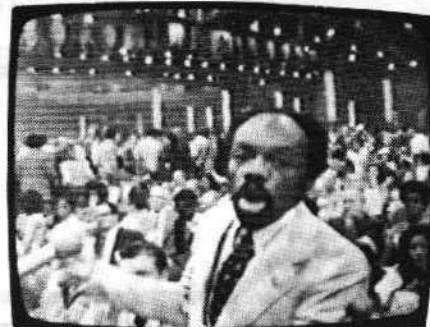
Delegates: Because we will not have unlimited access to the floor, we want to pick up on specific behind-the-lines Convention-related activity. If we can develop a rapport with delegates and hang out with them we can be there at the informal moments which the networks can't cover but which can give a better sense of the Convention than staged interviews.

Specifically, we should try to be with delegates at dinner, in caucus rooms, in their hotel rooms, at parties, etc. We already have pledges of access from different state delegates and one may even take a Porta-Pak on the floor. Rather than cover a lot of them, we should concentrate on a few as tape, others for intelligence. The continuing saga of a delegate may make a good continuity device in the final edit.

In terms of what types of delegates, they should be chosen as to color and articulation of viewpoint, and whether or not you'd want to hang out with them. Specifically we're thinking of people like a middle-aged Texas liberal friend of LBJ's, and Wallace people.

The Media: Miami Beach is the world's largest TV studio. The hall itself is a TV studio. We need to document the media presence. This can be done partly through visuals which show equipment, crews, and interviews; and partly through sound: either newsmen talking to each other, or interviews with newsmen. In fact, newsmen are the only people we would consider doing a formal interview with.

You should also make friends with newsmen as they'll give you tips about events and processes. Chances are they



"We've just got to fan out among the delegations and work our asses off!"



VICTORY! Shirley and Willy.



Wallace Delegate, Alberta Johnston:
"I think all the media's slanted."

FOUR MORE YEARS

won't feel threatened by us but will be amused and want to help.

Pseudo-Events: Anything which happens for the media will be overcovered by it. Yippies, for example, will stage media events. Instead of taking them at face value we need to shoot behind-the-scenes and debunk them just as we would the straight media or straight culture. A lot of people are coming down here to get press attention. They will. By the time our edit appears people will be tired of hearing and seeing them. Moreover, demonstrations and press conferences tend to be didactic in that it's people telling you what to think. That makes slow, talky tape. Better to have spontaneous behavior which happens in process (as in hanging out with delegates).

Confrontations: People in Miami Beach are real edgy (see enclosed situation report). Some hippies may be into violence although their leaders have been cool. Some shots of trashing might be worth it. But chances are it won't turn into permanent confrontation like in Chicago in 1968. Our feeling is that confrontation tape is a cliche of Porta-Pak video and we're tired of it. One reason for TTVT is to give viewers an idea of the range of alternate video, because too often they mistake the possibilities of the equipment with the fact that it's always used in the service of the same content.

We're not into declarative, explicit typed action or statements done wholly for the media. At best, we want to cover the media covering those actions and cover the people planning for or reflecting on them. The actions themselves are of negligible importance to us.

Other possibilities: You should try and screen your tape as much as possible and get feedback on it. If something's working we'll want more, and if not etc. Unlike the pencil press we can't report on something if we weren't there. Unlike broadcast TV, we can't make it happen. Thus, everyone working on TTVT has an intelligence function to ensure that we have cameras in the right place at the right time.

Style: Whatever Porta-Paks do that TV doesn't is what we want to do. This means injecting ourselves into the material, intimate access to situations, the use of special lenses. The print analogue to what we're trying to do is collage, but not of hard-edged well



Nixon Supporter



Private Party



promises alone can't win over Sammy Davis, Jr...



"The women here are very enjoyable..."

cropped images. Rather we're looking for found art like snapshots, postcards, and sketches, whatever their video counterparts might be.

HARDWARE

. . . We will have about 10 Porta-Paks with five and possibly seven in use at a time (we hope to use two cameras on some situations). This means that back-ups can be gotten if something goes bad, and that people taping at night won't need daytimers to return to get equipment.

If you've brought hardware we need an inventory form filled out and you must label your equipment. TTVT will return all borrowed equipment in operating condition, assuming it was brought to us that way.

SOFTWARE

If we lose track of tape we're fucked. In addition to screening your own tape and telling us what's on it (tape screening will happen in the living room), you've got to make sure it's labeled. We have to edit 70 hours in two weeks and if there's a lot of searching to be done we can't do it.

When a crew returns from shooting they must see that their tape is given to the person who is logging software at the time. Any raw (i.e. unused tape) must also be returned.

We will also maintain a log book which has a numbered page for each corresponding number tape. This book will be for in-depth notation of tape content. Any time someone decides to preview tape he or she should note the chronological sequence of action in the log book. You should also make odometer (i.e. counter) notations corresponding to hot spots with the counter set at zero when the tape starts.

Got that?

CONTENT RAP

In the end, our tapes must represent the event—far less so than traditional media trips—but the content of the event must be there. Our role is unique. Our slant is unique. The emphasis is on the feel of the events and the reactions of real people involved in the Miami Beach process, including ourselves. Audio does matter. We are reporting, albeit in our own manner. We have to get people to talk—not FOR us, but hopefully while they're talking and really saying things to each other. Our focus on the subjective feel

of the place and time is not a license or a substitute for random video. The subjectivity and honest feel of real occurrences comes from shooting real things, things that include the media floating all around the city and the convention hall; the real interaction between delegates and the powers that be on a personal level in the hall and particularly around the hotels and such during the day. In toto, what we're about is producing quality tape that will stand on its own to communicate that there is another and a viable way to present the feel of an event and a social space that has been neglected, rejected and missing from media coverage to date. Our documents should and must document OUR activities in the process of going about taping them. The tape should be running when we sit down with an interviewee-type. How they relate to us and to the media is a crucial part of the total image we have to project. Our ability to move in and out of process within the tapes will determine the success of communicating our point of view.

The conventions ARE a television event. The networks do their thing. Ours encompasses them and their activities. We must relate to what we see them doing and try to amplify it—not in terms of the image, so much as in terms of capturing the process that they are into. We, like everyone else in Miami, realize that the networks are what the convention is about. Our tape has to reflect their presence and their ineptitudes, inabilities, and limitations.

DECISION STRUCTURE

Instead of jobs, i.e. one person charged with the same task no matter where he or she is, we plan to have roles.



Press Passes.



"I'm not interested in the convention."

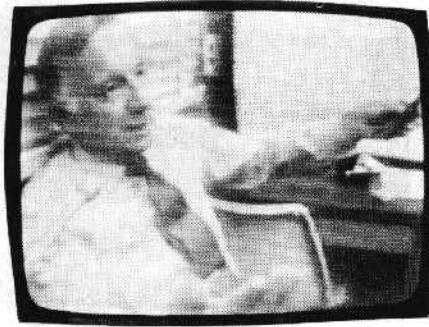


Jerry Rubin in Flamingo Park.

TVTV tapes are available on EIAJ I format for \$125 each and in cassette format for \$135 each.



"I think I might rather watch this one at home. Honest."



"We can't cover the news in a half-hour every evening...that's ridiculous. People shouldn't rely on tv alone for all the news..."

Specifically, there will be one central co-ordinator stationed at the house at all times. This person will change. But whoever it is at the time will be at the center of the decision structure.

That structure is based on our communications resources. Specifically, there are two phones at the house and two at the hall. In addition, the house will have all scheduling information and the UPI convention wire.

Each morning we will determine assignments through intelligence and what people want to do. When you get to a spot it's up to you to determine if your energy is being well spent. If you think you need more help then call the house and we'll provide what's available. If you think it's time to leave then call and we'll let you know if there's somewhere else to go. If you need a ride or your equipment breaks down, then the house is also the place to call.

It's assumed that if you're not in regular touch you're doing something useful. But you should let us know whenever you make a major change of location. Ultimately, the success of the project depends on being in the right place at the right time and that means having someone to be there, not just knowing about it.

Finally, people shooting tape will have to do just that. We've attempted to set-up our structure to provide as much support for camera crews as possible in terms of logistics and back-up. Taping has priority over everything.

For more information contact:
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"There's nothing to this that a woman couldn't have done a long time ago. It's a piece of cake...." NBC's Cassie Macken.