

Other ideas involve the two-way capabilities of the Internet: Why not launch a WebNet that paired up people from warring areas to talk to each other? Again, we would be using our peacekeeping image in an entirely new way, geared towards communications rather than the battlefield. We could also create an Internet soap opera that focusses on two families at loggerheads over religious (e.g., Northern Ireland) or ethnic differences (e.g., Sri Lanka). Add a Romeo and Juliet kind of couple and, through compelling story telling, lead the viewers towards a compassionate interest.

Finally, for Canada's international communications approach to feed into its variety of interests as described above, a single program on a satellite basis (again, in contrast to a whole network) could be launched. It would be a kind of late-night Journal without the documentary element, and would be truly international in scope. It would pair writers and city planners and rock stars and generals from different countries in a sort of Larry King Live with two guests instead of one. Although it is not exactly an original sounding idea, such an animal doesn't exist yet and there are those who say only Canada could carry it off. We have a reputation as credible filters or mediators of information and are seen to be skilled in the delivery of that format.

Who Makes and Controls the Content?

The question continually comes up — should the government be the creator of content or should it simply provide the funding, partial or otherwise? My answer is an unequivocal — sometimes, maybe, rarely. Once again, it depends on what forms of programming we're talking about.

Taking the scenarios noted above, I see the government providing very little in the way of content. It could perhaps co-ordinate the Internet material and pay for the translations. But the actual information on the companies, for example, should come from the companies themselves. Business people know what they can do and what they want to stress. They probably know as much, if not more, about foreign markets than the government does. As for documentaries on Canadian aid projects or any other programming with the potential to enhance Canada's image abroad, although the government could conceivably produce them, the credibility of the information being broadcast would be higher if they were independently produced. Obviously, the same goes for the Journal-type of program.

Clearly, I am biased here, tied as I am to a certain view of the value of journalism. I also feel that viewers are very smart and are quick to ask, "How do I know this is all true?" Unlike some of my colleagues, I would not go so far as to reject any government funding,⁷ but it would have to be at arm's-length with all editorial control in the hands of an independent producer.

In general, then, government itself should contribute very little in the way of content. It could, as it has in the past, dictate the priorities of subject matter

7. I will not undertake here any discussion of the complexities and delicacy of such an arrangement. Nor will I defend my view against the claim that he who pays controls. I'll merely repeat that it is not the ideal set-up, but given current financial realities it may be the only way to get such information reported. In addition, we already have government funding with Telefilm and CBC, don't we?