



A Conversation with Emerson Coleman, SVP, Programming, Hearst Television Parts 1 & 2

Host: Stacey Schulman (SS)

Guest: Emerson Coleman (EC)

Part 1

SS: Next week is the annual conference for Television Programming Executives, affectionately known as NATPE. We are honored to have Emerson Coleman, the Senior Vice President of Programming at Hearst Television as our special guest to discuss the current TV landscape, the upcoming conference and what's hot for the TV landscape today and tomorrow. I'm Stacey Schulman and this is In Tune...Emerson!

EC: Wow that sounds so formal!

SS: Oh my gosh!

EC: Oh my goodness. NATPE. Most people don't know what NATPE even stands for.

SS: Well, why don't you tell us?

EC: People used to say "nappy," I would go there and they would say, "oh is this the "nappy" conference?"

SS: So what's it stand for, Emerson?

EC: National Association of Television Program Executives. That's what it stands for but you hear it pronounced NAP-TE, NAT-PEE, NAPPY...every possible variation.



SS: That's right, and sometimes people say it 3 different ways just make sure they covered it somewhere in there.

EC: That's right. But it's coming up soon.

SS: It is, and it's next week in fact. So, you're on the board of NATPE, is that right?

EC: I'm on the board, I've been on the board of NATPE for 67 years now, I've lost count it's been so long.

SS: That's 6-7 years, not 67.

EC: It's been a long time, a long time. Probably closer to the 60 or 70. I think since, wow, late '90s, early 2000's? I've lost count at this point.

SS: How's it changed since you've been on that board?

EC: Oh it's changed dramatically. I mean some of the fundamentals are still there, but it's not the size that it was, it doesn't need to be that size today. But at one point it was 18,000 or so strong.

SS: In terms of attendees.

EC: In terms of attendees, and it was massive and it was centered at convention centers rather than where we are today. We have a floor, but there are also many people in suites and in cabanas. Miami is a great location, but at one point it was actually so massive that it was overwhelming. I remember my first NATPE, and I was so determined to see every possible piece of product that I could see. I walked to almost every single booth, which is nearly impossible.

SS: Did you wear a hole in your shoes?



EC: I probably needed to buy an extra pair of shoes, but I looked at so much content and I thought that that was my job and responsibility - and it is - to find the very best stuff and select the very best material and give it a shot and give it a chance. I was so proud that I had done that the very first NATPE. That was in January, then I started to get the phone calls in April and May from some of the shows saying "well, guess what, we're not going to go forward." Actually, some of the shows didn't bother to call, unfortunately. And then I realized, as a lot of people realize, why you see so much of the same product sometimes because you go back to the same distributors because you have a better sense of whether those shows are going to advance and make the cut. It's too bad, it's hard just to get started, it's hard for some shows. It doesn't necessarily mean that you have the best idea and that your show gets across the finish line and launches. It's really hard to get the launch and it's even harder, of course, once you launch to have a successful show.

SS: Well that's true and especially now, right? We see so many station groups there's so much consolidation. When I started in the business NATPE was huge as well -

EC: I'm sorry, how did you pronounce it?

SS: "NAT-PE."

EC: Just making sure.

SS: Yeah I think I did that right...but it was the biggest thing that I could attend during the year and it was in New Orleans and it was larger than life. And like you, I tried to see everything I possibly could see.

EC: It was very transactional at one point.

SS: Yes!



EC: Because that was where you would really make or break shows and you would actually come to the show and do a lot of deals. There were shows that were launched at NATPE, there were shows that were extended at NATPE, there were shows that were cancelled at NATPE. That was sort of the pruning ground. It's less transactional today, at least from my vantage point it's more focused on futures, which is really important and very significant, but you're not necessarily going to NATPE to decide what you're going to run next fall at 10 a.m. Those days I think are behind us.

SS: So talk to me a little bit more about that about the "future" piece of it. What are you looking for when you go to NATPE now?

EC: Well I'm sure it varies for groups, but our group, specifically, we are focused on the 2021 and 2022 seasons, you know as we go to NATPE, our Fall '20 is largely done. We're making decisions about 2021 and beyond and those decisions will really play out over the course of the next 4-8 months, and then the cycle starts again. In September we are buyers. So, what happens between now and September is really critical for the shows. Even those that have extended deals for the 2020 season. Because we're in the zone right now where you are determining where are you are going to be for 2021, and the content providers are very much aware of that and they are positioning themselves, and when we go to NATPE next week we'll be pitched shows that are launching in 2021 and 2022.

SS: It's a long cycle, but it comes around quickly, doesn't it?

EC: It does come around quickly, absolutely.

SS: So tell me about the pitching, what's the craziest pitch you've ever heard at NATPE?

EC: The craziest pitch?! Oh, I have to clean this up then. Do I get paid for this, Bill? Ok, the craziest pitch. You know, there was a show once upon a time - it won't sound so crazy today - and I believe the first name was "Wed At First Sight." It was introduced at NATPE - this is now probably 15 years ago - and at the time it sounded unbelievable! Ok, how does this work now? So these two people, they're meeting for the first time, they're going



to get married just for the purposes of the show, and then it unfolds from there...I thought this can't possibly be. Although, how could you possibly take your eyes off of it? I mean there's sort of a version of that now, but at the time, that seemed unyielding. However, as I recall it got a sizable number of clearances, there was high interest in it. It didn't finally go forward, but I think for reasons other than the idea just being so unusual at the time -

SS: You think it would get picked up today?

EC: You bet.

laughter

SS: I call it rubbernecking programming, right?

EC: You bet, absolutely.

SS: There's a lot of content out there but there's a lot more places for content, as well it seems. I mean, if you forget about the ecosystem of linear television but with all the streaming and all the services...

EC: But don't forget about the ecosystem of linear television, right?

SS: No you can't, but I'm saying there's a lot of places for people to go with concepts these days.

EC: Which is great for producers, it's also great for talent, it's great for the competition and I think overall it's better for everybody. We have to figure out the economics of all of this still, but I can't imagine anyone coming up with a really inventive, innovative concept today that's not really targeting multiple platforms.

SS: Right. But still, what I find interesting is that if you take it from the Advertiser/Marketer side, a lot of people are in a rush to say linear television has had its heyday and things



are changing. But yet, there are big stars and big production auspices that still want to make regular local television. Syndicated television. Why do you think that is?

EC: I think because it's smart. Because if you get it right, it's like an annuity and it goes on and on and on and there's no better business. It's just hard to get it right. I will say it's not necessarily about the biggest names, although we're happy to see the names that are out there. It's really about having the opportunity to find the right lane to produce the best product that has staying power, that's going to attract a wide audience, hopefully a broad audience and has the ability to evolve over time so that it's around not for one season or two seasons but for multiple seasons. That is really difficult.

SS: It is very difficult, and the relationship that is built between audiences and the content that's on linear television day in and day out in your living room, in your kitchen, is very strong. It's an amazing environment for marketers to be a part of.

EC: You bet. And to your point, there are more opportunities today which is really encouraging. Because the truth of the matter is if you and I sitting here have the world's greatest idea (and Bill, if you have the world's greatest idea too)...

SS: Bill is our producer, for all of you listening out there.

EC: He's promised me I'm getting paid for this. If we have the world's greatest idea, it is really hard to advance that and get [the show] on. You look at the number of people that you need to talk to, which is actually a very small number. In order to go from point A to point B, it is really daunting. So, it's not a situation where we're necessarily seeing the very best ideas get through but it's encouraging to have more people trying. Now there are more opportunities because there are more places to go. It's not just three places your show can land. If you're talking about a "big stage," "big tent" kind of show, then you have limited options. So it's actually encouraging to see all the people taking the chances and risks they are taking today. You have to applaud CBS for coming out with The Drew Barrymore Show, and Debmartel for [The] Nick Cannon [Show], for example. They are really building on the foundation that was laid last year with [The] Kelly Clarkson [Show] and



Tamron Hall, because they have demonstrated that there is a way to launch these kinds of, I like to call them, “big stage” shows. They have become established and they open up the doors for some other shows as well.

SS: Three years ago, we had a NATPE where we were all wondering what was going on. There really wasn't anything new to talk about, it didn't seem like many of the syndicators were coming out with new shows. There was a lot of concern about what the marketplace was going to look like going forward, but then last year happened and we got Tamron and we got Kelly and we got Mel, and a whole slew of other options. It was almost like Christmas, you know?

EC: Exactly. We went through a long drought. As you said, we were walking through the halls of NATPE at the Fontainebleau in Miami Beach, and we were looking for product to buy and there was nothing to purchase. There were no major shows, even though the real estate was there, there were no major shows to acquire which was really, really odd. At the same time the following year, there were really no shows to buy for the weekends. Now all that's changed and it's been a seat change, it's as if there was no middle ground, it was all or nothing. Now, the real estate is hard to come by and there are lots of lots of shows out there. So, it's really good to see that. This will be a great NATPE especially for traditional buyers and sellers. I think every major studio has a major show either for this fall or the following fall, and it's been a while since we've seen that.

SS: Yeah, agreed. From your board perspective, other than the content that we know we're all going to see, what should we not miss at NATPE this year?

EC: I'm not that bored, we're just getting started! From my perspective, I think there will be a few surprises. I think there will be a few announcements that haven't come out yet from some of the distributors. I think there will be plenty of star-power. There is a station summit on Wednesday, and that kicks off with the presentation of the Iris Awards. The iconic Iris Awards are returning to NATPE. That is a VIP invitation-only event, but I can tell you it's already at capacity and I would say not to be missed except I think it's hard to get in these days unless you know somebody.



SS: And if you're out there listening, and you have a ticket, lucky you.

EC: Contact Stacey Shulman and she can help you with any tickets that you might need.

SS: Thank you for that, Emerson.

EC: Sure, you're welcome. Good luck with that. I can tell you they have got - I don't think it's been announced so I can't get too far ahead of it unfortunately, since you said from my board perspective. But the people that we will be participating at that event from the MC, to the presenters and the recipients, I would tell you that if the event itself is an hour, the photo-op afterwards will probably be another hour.

SS: Wow.

EC: It'll be a major event. Later that evening they have the Tartikoff Awards, which has become a real singular definitive moment for NATPE. Wednesday might be the day to remember at NATPE. Tuesday, I think some people are still getting in, and getting settled, you have lots of meetings but that's also an eventful day. Thursday becomes catch-up day for a lot of people because there's only so much you can do in the first two days and you're running around and putting together the rest of the meetings for Thursday. There's plenty of activity on campus, but in Miami in January, especially if you're coming from the cold Northeast, for example, it's a great place to be and there's plenty to do there. It's really been a good fit for the conference and I think there's a lot of upside there.

SS: I've always judged the success by how many people are still reading the Tuesday NATPE Daily on Wednesday in the gym that morning because it just so hard to keep track and stay up-to-date on all the changes. It's a great conference.

EC: What are you looking forward to it NATPE?



SS: I have to admit, I just love the scene. I really do. I got into this business as a young person coming out of college, and I always used to read all the Crain Communications, it was called Electronic Media back then, it doesn't exist anymore. I was just so excited about the industry that when I first got to go to NATPE several years after I started it was the biggest honor for me and just walking through the halls, walking through those doors where there's a big name studio that you've heard about your whole life, or meeting a show producer, or talent – it's still a thrill. I still love being in this business and I love being around people who love being in this business. So to me, when I go to NATPE it's like going home, I'm in my element and it's still exciting.

EC: It's wonderful to hear. One of the things I appreciate is attending the Brandon Tartikoff Awards because the entire industry seems to be assembled under one roof, for one night celebrating the business that we are in. You've got groups of people that are very competitive, they've spent all year kind of going at it – not that it's not healthy and reasonably friendly– and especially when the sales end, they are very very good at their jobs and at this moment, you are listening to the people on stage and their comments about their lives as they are accepting this prestigious honor. You're looking around the room and everyone is just amazed and impressed and you realize that sort of peace and harmony in the land, we're all on the same team and we appreciate the work that has been done even if it's our competitor that's done it, and it's really a beautiful moment to see just for this one quiet moment where you really realize how extraordinary this particular industry is. But there's something about being introduced to a lot of new projects too – we know what we expect to see from the major studios, but there's a lot of fresh ideas from people that are just trying to get started or trying to figure out how to navigate their way through the business. They have an idea, “how do I get it on?” There are tons and tons of sessions that take place also that are really, really eye-opening and informative which I would encourage people to participate in. There's a huge international community present at NATPE and it gives it much more of a global definition, and being in Miami especially it's really a very lively, vibrant event. I can't wait to leave cold New York and be down in Miami.



A Conversation with Emerson Coleman, SVP, Programming, Hearst Television Part 2

SS: 2020 marks a new decade and a new opportunity to understand the changing complexion of the U.S. population in the upcoming census. On the front lines are America's broadcasters who are licensed to serve the interests of their unique communities. Emerson Coleman, the head programmer for Hearst TV, talks with me in the 2nd part of a 2-part interview about developing content for our evolving nation and the important role of broadcasters in the electoral process. I'm Stacey Schulman, and this is IN TUNE.

If you don't know, out there in the listening audience- Emerson is quite a distinguished figure in the television space.

EC: A distinguished figure?!

SS: Yes you are distinguished figure!

EC: I don't know...

SS: You'll have to live with that, Emerson.

EC: I think you're being very generous.

SS: I'm not, because listen out there - Emerson has not only been leading the programming efforts at Hearst over the last few years but he has extensive experience with local stations in Baltimore and in Boston, and has been an Executive Producer of



local programming and highly honored programming for a long time including, now as Executive Producer of Matter of Fact with Soledad O'Brien, which is a weekly political talk show. Talk to us a little bit about that show, why are you guys doing it?

EC: I love talking about Matter of Fact and Soledad's doing an extraordinary job and has truly elevated the show. Our timing was great for launching that show because it was at a time when the political narrative was really heating up. It is a half hour weekly barter show which in most cases makes no sense, that's not a business to go into it's just so hard to win there and you see a lot of articles lately and there has been at some out this week about the lack of weekend shows and how difficult the economics are for those weekend shows. This is been one of those programs that's proven to be an exception to the rule. I think largely because there was a need for it. I truly think it's a different kind of show, I don't think it's breaking the molds necessarily, but I think the approach and again the timing has been just right. It's not a panel show, it's not a show where we have three or four or five experts come on and talk about the topic of the day and then you'll see the same experts next week or the following week. There's a huge amount of field production, it's not highbrow, it's very ground level. We're looking at stories that are untold, stories that go unreported, stories that are overlooked and stories that will really have impact and matter. We do a lot of explainers, because sometimes if you're watching people throw out terms, that there's an assumption that everybody understands exactly what they mean and that's not necessarily the case. Gerrymandering might sound like an everyday part of some people's vocabulary but that's not the case for everyone you kind of have to break it down, and when you break it down, it's actually pretty informative what you might learn. We define ourselves as conversations as diverse as America. Now we're in the middle of a vast listening tour so we are going to Chicago, Detroit, we are headed to South Carolina we have been down to the Border, we've been to Philadelphia, we've been out to Sacramento in the midst of the fires and so forth, so we are casting the net as wide as possible. Again, one of the things that makes us unique is that when the opportunity is warranted we get out of Washington we don't spend as much time in the studio. So I think the show is really distinctive, we have great producers led by Soledad and Tolleah Price our Executive Producer, and Ash Ayers, and Rob Pohle, and our team there. If I could pick the job that I wanted to have to start out in television or as my time



advanced in TV, I would pick this job. I am very jealous of my entire staff down there because they work their tails off but they have the best time I think, and they know that they're doing really important work.

SS: I think successful television has a lot to do with both the idea and the execution. You can have a great idea but if you don't execute it well it doesn't do well. You have great execution but the content is not there it doesn't do well. What I love about Matter of Fact and Soledad is that you see the need for this content, you see the need for America to need explanation to need to be represented in conversation in a different way. But also for the story to be told by someone who is young and relatable and representative of the changing population and you take that as the content it is and you put it in a space in weekend morning TV where it's up against things like Face the Nation, Sunday Morning and Meet the Press. You have information for the everyman I feel like, and it's very accessible and it's not overbearing and I think it has a lot to do with the show's success.

EC: Thank you for that. We think part of the population was being left out of the conversation, and that was some of the thinking that went into the design of the show. We watch some of the other shows, other shows we support by the way, we try to be complementary and a lot of times Matter of Fact airs alongside some of the legacy shows. They're having conversations about Latino voters, and no one was talking to Latino voters. They were talking about African-American issues and they were talking about really important women's issues and there weren't enough women that were a part of that conversation. Those are some of the demographics that we have targeted. We also skew a lot younger than the legacy shows, which I think you might expect but we found a really great lane for ourselves. It's a sizable audience each week and it's growing and growing and so it still has tremendous upside. It's hard as a syndicated show because we're in different time periods, it's not as if you can find us at 9 a.m. everywhere across the nation on Sunday morning. So you have to work a little harder, but that means we work a little harder too and I think it's really made us stronger as a result.

SS: It's also a testament to what I think television, and specifically what local television does best. We know that news is a cornerstone of what we deliver and it should be



because we're closest to the communities, but just as a station group I think Hearst obviously has a pedigree in news, but you have an amazing commitment to delivering news and talking to your constituencies in a very unique way. You just announced this commitment 2020 effort around the political space - it's just a wonderful example of how local broadcasters are making a difference, not trying to make a difference, really making a difference and continuing to do so. I'd love to hear your perspective on how Hearst feels about that as an organization - their commitment to things like Commitment 2020 and where it lands in the ethos of the company.

EC: Gladly. I'll be the first to tell you that I think our news operations are best in class led by Barb Maushard and Andrew Vrees and their team. But it just underscores the strength of our station group and at the core of that strength are these news operations. I've been in those meetings where they have made the decisions that I think, to be fair, some other groups would not make either because of the expense or the time or just the fact that there was an easier decision to make and we will leave that meeting and come out that room and it's clear to everyone that whenever possible we're going to do the right thing. Obviously, there are always some concerns in terms of cost but the reality is we have a commitment to our viewers and we have a relationship and partnership in these local markets and we have a leadership position in those markets for a reason, so it actually gives me a great sense of pride when I leave those meetings and we make an announcement like we did for Commitment 2020. Or if we're covering major events, you won't be in one of our markets and miss any of the major events on our stations because we'll be the ones covering it. Maybe other people will be there too, but even if they're not we will be the one on top of that. I've been at the company a number of years and that's always been the position. I think that's one of the things that distinguishes us. The news operations are at the center of what we do. Really what I do is, even though I might be acquiring entertainment programming, for the most part is really try to support those news operations so that we have really good lead ins, so that we have hopefully good flow and an audience that has an appetite for other kinds of content but it's all built around our news operations.



SS: It's been a bit of a while since we heard a lot of noise about fake news, probably because there have been other things that we have been focusing on as a nation. How did the Hearst organization respond to that? How did they think about that?

EC: I'm not sure that I can speak for the entire organization, but I think largely we've been pretty vocal about that and saying pretty clearly that in this day and age when they're so much chatter about fake news, it's more important than ever for us to be clear, for us to provide quality journalism, for us to be accurate. We certainly try to be first, we're not always going to be first, but maybe that might not necessarily be the goal because accuracy is more critical. We want to be leaders in all of our market in the extent that when people are looking for news that they can believe in and news that they trust, they will look to us first. You've seen the ratings and the rankings for the content that viewers find most trustworthy, and I think there's a reason that in the midst of all the chatter about fake news it's local stations that give viewers a sense of belief that they are getting the true story. So we want that to be us.

SS: We put together presentations all the time about the power of news, and the power of local news and local broadcasters and what they bring, and there are lots of times in your career when you go out and show a study and you say well this recent study we did shows that 'whatever entity I'm representing' is on top. The beautiful thing about what we're discussing now is that it really doesn't matter which study you look at, whether it's a Pew study or Roper study or GFK MRI study. You pick any entity that's done any sort of investigation around what news source people think is the most credible, least biased, responsible and it always turns up that local television is on top and way ahead of any of the cable entities or other options out there and there's a reason for that. I think it's frankly because people and communities know that these organizations are in their communities they are real people, they are standing on their street corners and they are covering the events, the issues that are most relevant to them.

EC: 100%. We have that connection. We have earned that partnership in these communities, we need to keep earning it of course, but I think that's what separates us from so many other platforms.



SS: I'd say that's a high note to end on what do you think, Emerson?

EC: Depends on Bill. Bill, what do you think?

B: I think it's perfect!

EC: Okay, satisfactory then.

SS: Emerson, I want to thank you for taking the time out. It's got to be the busiest week of the year going into NATPE and I really appreciate you being with us.

EC: Thank you! Wonderful time.