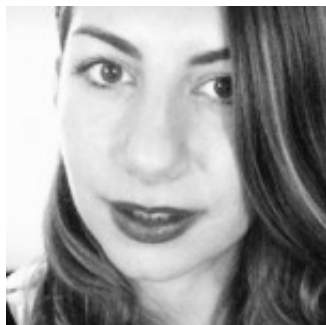


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Eastern promise

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Leila Monks, VP of commercial and current production for the UK's Zig Zag Productions, explains why her commercial gaze is increasingly turning east to Russia and Ukraine.



Leila Monks

The term 'emerging markets' used to be a catch-all phrase for TV markets that we all knew had potential but were definitely not yet ready to compete with the big boys.

Well, as the world economy changes so do the world's TV markets and it seems the time has come for the so-called emerging markets to take centre stage. Russia and Ukraine, for example, were the focus of a Pact Export Accelerator event that I attended this week.

Did you know that Ukraine is the third largest European territory for format adaptation? No, neither did I. Furthermore, all but one of the top 10 shows on Ukrainian TV are international formats? News to me too.

But these little known facts (courtesy of K7 Media, which helped organise the Pact Russia/Ukraine event as part of the UK trade organisation's Six Steps to Export initiative) begin to paint a picture of the prevalence of formats in the Ukrainian market. More importantly, the event centred on the opportunities for rights holders to exploit their content there.

The top five channels in Ukraine in order of ratings are: Inter, 1+1, Ukraina, ICTV and STB. All of them are importing formats from the UK, Israel and other territories as they battle to remain on top.

Viktoriya Liezina-Maslyana and Oskana Petryshyn, executives from 1+1 Media Group, were beamed in live to give us a lowdown on what they are currently looking to acquire. The international formats they are producing at the moment are Wife Swap, Four Weddings, Great Bake Off, House Kitchen, The Voice and Voice Kids, Splash, Extreme Makeover, Got Talent, Amazing Race, How to Look Good Naked... As you can see, it's a long list.

They are specifically sourcing "reconstructed reality" and "travel reality" formats or scripted projects – and that can be drama or comedy. Ideally, formats will be proven but they are so hungry for the next big hit they will also look at paper ideas and jointly developing shows.

1+1 Media Group runs a format competition in which producers can enter their ideas and win money to make a pilot. The competition is open to everyone and details are on their website.

Irina Panfilova from Russia's CTC Media also joined the session remotely and her wish list consisted of general entertainment, with a focus on families, drama, comedy, lifestyle, cooking and renovation.

Currently airing on CTC is the Keshet format Green, Yellow or Red and its own version of the US comedy Everybody Loves Raymond – otherwise known as Everybody Loves Kostya.

Following the Pact event, I'll be pitching into these territories two of our original formats that have been getting a lot of traction internationally. Who Wears Wins is a strippable fashion format in which four women, each with very different styles, wear each other's wardrobes for a day and score 'a day in the life' with their new looks. The second is You Have Reached Your Final Destination, a travel-based quiz in which the quizmaster is the car's satellite navigation system. This format is also strippable and offers great opportunities for brand/off-air promotion.

Both of these can be produced in high volume, which suits the needs of the Ukrainian and Russian territories.

The high production values of the local Ukrainian and Russian productions were stressed and evident from the trailers shown at the event. And these format adaptations are often then sold into other CIS territories as acquisitions, which means even more exposure.

My impression from the event was that Russia is a harder nut to crack than Ukraine. When Russia was being discussed the word "loyalty" was brought up time and time again, as was the word "vodka" – make of that what you will. However, if you do manage to crack it then certainly the rewards can be plentiful.



1+1's Great Bake Off

Speaking at the session was Simon Tucker from Mir Reality, a company that has produced thousands of hours of content for Russian TV. These include Russia's Next Top Model, Faking It and Come Dine With Me, which amounted to 1,700 episodes alone.

He stressed that doing business in Russia tends to happen face to face and once you have built a relationship with a key buyer then they will come back for more – but you must put the work in and persevere.

Kiev Media Week, held in Ukraine from September 10-13, will be a great way to get in front of these buyers. Pact is sending a delegation of UK indies to the event and there is a whole day dedicated purely to formats too. If you're thinking about extending your reach into these territories then this would be a great place to start.

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