



Independent TV Network Finds Strength In Numbers Challenge

Successfully managing a private-sector, independent television station is a lot tougher in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) than in most places. In addition to the poor economic environment, competition from foreign-owned stations makes for an unfair playing field. The foreign-owned stations attract major advertisers by selling air-time in multi-country packages, sometimes throwing BiH into the deal for free. A further challenge is the unusual fact that Bosnia's Public Broadcasting Station (PBS) is permitted to sell a limited amount of ad time which is not permitted in most countries and creates an additional competition for domestic operators.



Photo: USAID/BiH Samir Hadzibajric

Taping of "Sports Centar" show in Mreza Plus studio.

"Thanks to the experiences gained during USAID's training, we are now able to manage by ourselves, and we are very proud that the Network operates as a local independent media entity."

- Darko Aleksic, Mreza Plus Manager

Results

After attending USAID's training, Mreza Plus manager Darko Aleksic developed a professional business plan for the network including a detailed strategy and long-term financial objectives. This marked the first time Mreza Plus had developed a business plan without outside help. As proof of its success, Mreza Plus boosted its ratings from 13.2% in February 2003 to 15.8% one year later. Moreover, Mreza Plus has already increased its contracts with ad agencies by 8.5% compared to the year prior. Due to improved financial management, the network has purchased high-quality programming that has helped it surpass the foreign competition and maintain a solid second place in the ratings behind PBS. Thanks to USAID's assistance, the network is not only successful, but truly independent.

Initiative

In 2001, USAID supported the cause of private, independent media by assisting in the launch of Mreza Plus, BiH's first countrywide commercial television network. The network is made up of five member stations (from both the Federation and Republika Srpska) and a growing number of affiliates.

Banding together gave the independent stations a better chance to compete but financial management was still a challenge. USAID stepped in to provide training for the station managers which focused on financial and general management, television programming and promotion, and advertising/sales management.

