



SPECIAL REPORT

Business & Media Institute

ADVANCING THE CULTURE OF FREE ENTERPRISE IN AMERICA



Business & Media Institute . 325 SOUTH PATRICK ST . ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314 . (703)683-9733 . www.BusinessandMedia.org

June 21, 2006

Bad Company

For the American Businessman, Primetime is Crimetime

This is the first in a three-part look at how the American businessman is portrayed in both the entertainment and news media. The Business & Media Institute also plans to examine how businessmen are characterized on the silver screen and in TV news.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The entertainment industry boasts it provides but a depiction of reality. In the real world, is the average businessman a murderer, kidnapper and/or philandering backstabber?

If not, why is this the way the businessman is portrayed on television? In the world of entertainment TV, businessmen pose a greater threat than the mob.

Almost 10 years ago, the Media Research Center's Business & Media Institute published "Businessmen Behaving Badly," which found that businessmen on TV committed more crimes than any other demographic.

In this new study, BMI looked at 129 episodes from 12 top-rated dramas on the four networks: ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC. These broadcasts were picked from two "sweeps" months in 2005 - May and November - when networks try to attract the largest audiences to maximize ad dollars.

In this look at primetime, BMI found:

- **TV Overwhelmingly Negative toward Business:** Negative plots about business and businessmen outnumbered positive ones by almost 4-to-1. Of the 39 episodes that included business-related plots or characters, 30 (77 percent) cast businessmen and commerce in a negative light.

- **Businessmen Are Villains, Not Heroes:** When businessmen appeared on TV, they were up to no good. Only NBC's "Medium" and "Las Vegas" featured businessmen in a consistently positive light.

- **TV Businessmen a Greater Threat to Society than Terrorists or Gangs:** According to primetime TV, you are 21 times more likely to be kidnapped or murdered at the hands of a businessman than the mob. Businessmen also committed crimes five times more often than terrorists and four times more often than gangs.

- **Businessmen Almost as Likely to Commit a Serious Felony as Career Criminals:** Businessmen turned up as kidnappers or murderers almost as often (21 times) as hardened criminals like drug dealers, child molesters and serial killers put together (23 times).

- **"Law & Order" Franchise Finds Businessmen Guilty:** In the three popular NBC shows - "Law & Order," "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit," and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" - almost 50 percent of the felonies (13 of 27) - mostly murders - were committed by businessmen.

- **"Desperate" Dating at Work:** The ABC drama "Desperate Housewives" portrayed the office as a glorified dating service. Each office environment during the study period featured co-workers sleeping together, lying or risking adultery for the sake of advancement.

- **The Worst Network:** CBS was the worst of the four networks, offering up far more business criminals than private-sector heroes. Shows like "Cold Case," "CSI: NY," and "NCIS" stacked the deck against businessmen.

- **Best in Show:** It's ironic that network executives had to travel to the gambling and showgirl capital of America - Las Vegas - to portray business in a positive way. But NBC's show of the same name used this positive narrative to counter "Law & Order's" cynical portrayal of business.

To find out more information or to set up an interview, contact Colleen O'Boyle at 703-683-5004 ext. 122

BMI Recommends:

While Hollywood's exaggeration of criminal businessmen might be good for the networks, it is bad for America. Research has shown the negative messages of TV can impact the attitudes of young viewers.

The constant parade of criminal CEOs and murdering MBAs on television can create a climate of mistrust in a basic institution of society. Network executives have a responsibility not to tear down the free enterprise system - the very system that enables their networks to succeed.

To that end, BMI has the following recommendations:

- **Feature Offices that Reflect Reality:** As crazy as Hollywood offices might be, TV writers and producers aren't likely to be surrounded by murdering businessmen.

TV businessmen were a greater threat to society than terrorists, gangs or the mob.

The average workplace isn't like that either.

- **Feature Crimes that Reflect Reality:** Are the prisons really filled with as many businessmen as they are career criminals? If art is to imitate life, portrayals of people dealing with normal work situations should find their way into entertainment.

- **Show Business Heroes:** Heroes don't have to be just policemen and social workers. Private-sector businessmen help society as well. Businessmen, innovators and risk takers shouldn't be cast mainly as criminals, cheats and phishers.



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One enduring American cultural image is the man in the gray flannel suit.

A businessman, with briefcase in tow and tie crisply knotted, who left the family for an honest day's work and eventually returned home worn and weary.

But TV long ago abandoned that icon and replaced it with the stereotype of corporate evil.

The classic family man like insurance salesman Jim Anderson (played by Robert Young) on "Father Knows Best" has turned into the ruthless CEO. Entertainment television now shows businessmen as cheats, liars, philanderers and criminals.

In a study of top-rated dramas during the "sweeps" months of May and November 2005, the Media Research Center's Business & Media Institute (BMI) found that the networks advanced a largely negative view of both the American businessman and the very idea of business.

Along with widespread crime, the workplace was little more than an expensive Monday-to-Friday dating service. The 40-hour workweek was rife with immorality and dishonesty.

And it didn't stop with the openly negative. There was little positive, as well. Businessmen rarely helped solve society's problems through their skill or dedication.

Of the 12 shows BMI studied, only one, NBC's "Las Vegas" - set ironically in the notorious "Sin City" - offered narratives in which businessmen confronted challenges with skill and creativity instead of murder or sex.

On primetime television, victims were 21 times more likely to be kidnapped or murdered by businessmen than the mob.

Overview

The Business & Media Institute studied 129 episodes of the top 12 Nielsen-rated network TV dramas airing on ABC, NBC, CBS and FOX. Only 39 episodes featured plots alluding to commerce or primary characters who were businessmen.

Of those, 30 (77 percent) were anti-business - almost four times as many as were graded pro-business. Only nine episodes (23 percent) were graded pro-business for the actions of the characters or the nature of the plot.

Dramas draw characters from many sectors of society, and those subjects are often exaggerated to entertain. However, a deeper look at the characters on these 12 shows revealed a drastically skewed picture of businessmen.

This BMI study found much more than ABC's "Desperate Housewives" treatment of office sex, or greedy pharmaceutical executives peddling a bad vaccine to the military in "Law and Order: Special Victims Unit."

On primetime television, victims were 21 times more likely to be kidnapped or murdered by businessmen than the mob.

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Businessmen also committed crimes five times more often than terrorists and four times more often than street gangs.

They were nearly as prolific villains (21 felonies) as hardened criminals like drug dealers, child molesters, and serial killers put together (23 felonies).

Businessmen and women killed their associates and slept around the office, while their corporations were painted as big, faceless and evil.

While one character on CBS's "Without a Trace" accused drug companies of "doing experimental drug trials on kids - kids," seldom did any business-related characters produce honest work or benefits for society.

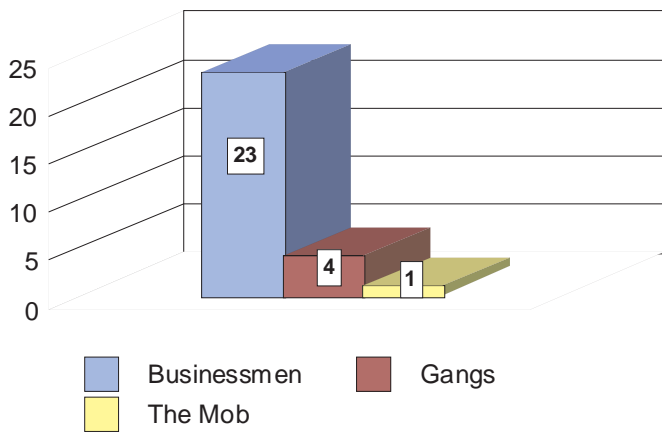
Criminals

The evening crime dramas portrayed businessmen as little more than sophisticated crooks. By contrast, the government was cast in a heroic role. The good guys worked in courts, police stations and crime labs.

Network television was peppered with career criminals and ex-cons, but a solid number of those bad guys were sports agents, venture capitalists and insurance agents. In plots that took a negative tack toward business, 15 of the 30 (50 percent) instances included criminal businessmen.

Some businessmen murdered because they needed "a competitive edge" for their products, as in one "CSI: Miami" episode. Others killed because their debtors were spending their money on "Lamborghinis and sushi," like a venture capitalist in CBS's "Cold Case."

Businessmen More Dangerous Than Mobsters or Gangs



Businessmen committed crimes more often than gangsters or the mob.

Of all the network crime dramas BMI studied, the three "Law and Order" shows were the most overtly hostile toward businessmen. NBC's blockbuster crime programs matched almost every hardened criminal with a bigoted lawyer, cheating CEO or murdering office lackey.

In 24 episodes of "Law and Order," "Law and Order: SVU," and "Law and Order: Criminal Intent," 11 plotlines featured criminal businessmen. Not one was favorable toward the private sector.

In addition, in those three popular NBC shows, almost 50 percent of the felonies (13 of 27) - mostly murders - were committed by businessmen.

In the May 4, 2005, "Law and Order" episode "Sport of Kings," Detective Joe Fontana and his sidekick Nick Falco investigated the murder of a jockey named Oscar. Their inquiry led them to Edgar, the CEO of a small manufacturing firm and the owner of a horse the jockey rode.

Edgar not only bought a \$3 million horse from Saudi Arabia with the company pension fund, but he shot Oscar when the jockey discovered what he was riding. The thoroughbred would have made a return on Edgar's "investment," or so the CEO would have had his employees believe.

However dangerous the workplace might have been for Edgar's underlings, the race track was no match for the lack of office morale in the May 1 episode of "Law and Order: Criminal Intent." In "No Exit," hitting the glass ceiling had deadly consequences.

When young employees of a consulting firm died in a rash of suicides, two detectives dug deep into the hostile working environment.

One of the victims was stressed from being overworked and underappreciated. Another young woman chose to kill herself after an affair with Leonard, the CEO of the firm. Aware of his young mistress's instability, Leonard instructed his lackey, Hubert, to find a way to get rid of her.

Hubert guiltily obliged by tempting her to commit suicide. Yet, he balked when Leonard asked him to kill off another young employee who might have discovered the affair.

The trifecta wouldn't be complete without the villains in an episode of "Law and Order: SVU."

In "Night," which aired May 3, Detectives Elliot Stabler and Olivia Benson investigated a string of brutal murders and rapes of immigrant women.

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NBC's "Law & Order: SVU" offered white-collar bigots and evil drug companies.

Jason was the portrait of a domineering, power-hungry cliché. Not only did he hit on women casually, but he also referred to one of the rape victims as a "wetback cleaning woman." In the end, however, his peculiar client was the one found guilty of the rapes.

These 15 episodes shared a common thread. Each fit a dramatic template that pitted detectives, district attorneys and other agents of a just government against vulgar businessmen willing to do anything or kill anyone to gain power.

With the exception of NBC's "Las Vegas," no major plotline in the study sample featured businessmen furthering the interests of society through their work ethic or creativity. On primetime television, the presence of businessmen ran counter to ethical behavior, almost at the same pace as hardened career criminals.

Even amidst a time of prosperity and a booming stock market, CBS's "Cold Case" portrayed venture capitalists loan-sharking their dot-com debtors.

In the Nov. 13 episode "Start Up," two late-1990s business partners and their key investor succumbed to greed and envy with disastrous results. Cliff, a venture capitalist, pitted two young Wharton School grads, Amy and Scott, against each other, ending in Amy's murder.

Cliff didn't just use his two-wood on the golf course; he used it on Scott's Ferrari after Scott and Amy's business hemorrhaged money. He gave Scott's car a bit of New Jersey justice, breaking the windows and knocking out the taillights. "You've been throwing around my money like confetti!" he shouted.

He then threatened that if they lost any more, "It would be worse than this!" To say this behavior is uncharacteristic of risk-taking investors often known as "angels" would be an understatement.

In "Start Up," even Cliff's assistant, Geraldine, had a hand in the sinister deeds. Highly resentful of the "femi-

After first suspecting a young defense attorney, Jason, of those vicious acts, the trail led to an eccentric inventor named Gabriel, one of Jason's wealthier clients.

Jason was the portrait of a domineering, power-

nist" Amy, Wright explained under interrogation that "the girl thought she could play with the big boys ... that they'd play fair," and after 22 years of taking care of her boss, Geraldine had been set up by him for securities fraud and murder.

She finally confessed that she overheard her boss and Scott discussing the plot to poison Amy. Apparently, Amy had discovered that Scott and Cliff were using their insider information to short the company's stock - a felony.

When pressed by Cliff about whether he had the guts to go through with the poisoning, Scott said that if anything came in the way of what he wanted, he'd "chop that mother off." Unsurprisingly, Cliff engineered the murder of his own wife in the same way he helped kill Amy.

It's also especially striking that Amy's business plans were inspired by the death of her brother from cancer. Given that Amy was the only character using her skills to the benefit of society, her murder was an especially cynical exercise.

The office wasn't just ripe for murder and embezzlement, but sordid affairs and backstabbing.

Philanderers

The office wasn't just ripe for murder and embezzlement, but sordid affairs and backstabbing. On ABC's "Desperate Housewives," employees at an advertising firm slept with the staff, used work to pursue married men, and applied knowledge of the affairs for extortion and personal gain. Episodes of "Desperate Housewives" and "Law and Order" focused more on workplace scandal and manipulative women than on those who worked hard to get ahead.

While "Desperate Housewives" deliberately aims for comic or shocking plot twists, its portrayal of the business world was more than skewed.

The May 1 episode "Fear No More" contrasted a devoted homemaker, Lynette, with her husband, Tom, who worked long hours at an advertising agency.

Tom was stuffy and two-dimensional, and he neglected his family and wife for the sake of professional advancement. As Lynette concerned herself with children and chores, she discovered Tom had a new co-worker who happened to be an old flame: Annabelle.

In this case, the office was little more than an expensive dating service.

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Before he was married, Tom had a tryst with Annabelle in the office, but "after a few torrid weeks" he abruptly left her for his eventual wife, Lynette, another new co-worker. Annabelle had returned and was looking for a repeat of history.

The next several episodes of "Desperate Housewives" outlined the battle between Annabelle and Lynette over Tom's attention. The lines between home and the workplace were often blurred, as Lynette made appearances at the office and Annabelle pursued Tom over dinners at his home.

Lynette threatened, "if she stays, I will haunt your office." In response, Tom dismissively offered her an office perk - a parking space.

By the May 15 showing of "Goodbye for Now," things had become so strained between Lynette and her husband that she habitually appeared at the office to monitor him.

After Annabelle picked Tom to travel with her on a project for a client in Hawaii, Lynette schemed to find him a new job with some of her old work contacts. When her contact said she needed someone like Lynette who was "cutthroat, ruthless," Lynette offered up Annabelle.

The plan backfired and Annabelle was promoted to vice president over Tom after Lynette had begged Tom's boss not to promote him, claiming that "if you [Tom] start traveling more, it's going to hurt your family." Tom was angered by the lost promotion and was fired on the spot.

Tom became a stay-at-home-dad while Lynette returned to work - an equally hostile workplace of snippy supervisors and tawdry affairs. Lynette's boss, Nina, was abusive and consistently made fun of her less-than-fashionable suits.

In the Nov. 27 episode, "That's Good, That's Bad," Lynette caught Nina in a rendezvous with the support staff. Instead of informing their superiors, Lynette blackmailed Nina to be a "bit nicer." Nina then took the upper hand and fired the staffer she was sleeping with.

Episodes' worth of office politics resulted in a sexual harassment suit and Nina's dismissal. But a drunken Nina warned Lynette that "our boss, I'm sorry ... your boss, is incompetent and selfish and has the attention span of a poodle ... This job sucks you dry!"

NBC's "Law and Order: Criminal Intent" also portrayed the workplace as an escort service.

In the May 15 episode, "My Good Name," Frank, a decorated ex-cop turned entrepreneur who started an ascendant international security consulting firm, was having an affair with a soon-to-be-murdered vice president of a municipal employees' union. This was in addition to an affair with his publicist, Janice, a manipulative adulteress and murderer.

NBC's "Medium" delivered a subtle contrast to this template of philandering businessmen. Joe, the husband of Patricia Arquette's main character, was a patient, stalwart and reliable father.

In the Nov. 7 "Judge, Jury, and Executioner," Joe swam against the TV current and rejected the advances of his ex-girlfriend. In the realm of primetime television, such principle was an exception to the rule.

On the rare occasion that businessmen were portrayed in television shows like "Desperate Housewives" and "CSI: Miami," they were almost certainly sleeping with co-workers or using sex to get ahead in their careers. For network television, the notion of hard work was either more taboo or boring than adultery.

Big Bad Corporations

Television's treatment of unsavory businessmen went well beyond the cheats, thugs and murderers in suits. Negative plots about business and businessmen outnumbered positive portrayals by almost 4 to 1.

Businesses were deemed worthy of suspicion or skepticism, even when network television expanded beyond the usual scripts about businessmen committing murder or raiding the company retirement fund.

While an occasional medical show overtly beat up on pharmaceutical companies, others tacitly criticized capitalism and the private sector.

The May 5 episode of NBC's "ER," "You Are Here," showed Dr. Lewis being passed over by the tenure board. She responded by venting to an administrator, Dr. Weaver.

As the two argued, the contrast's theme became clear: the hospital's businesslike reliance on funding trumped its concern for patient care.

Dr. Lewis charged, "forget excellence, forget performance ... just write a check to build a new wing." Never mind that all that lifesaving couldn't go on without funding.

Negative plots about business and businessmen outnumbered positive portrayals by almost 4 to 1.

The November 1 episode of Fox's "House" showcased another industry-bashing doctor. Traveling immunologist Dr. Charles came down with a complicated case of tuberculosis. He and Dr. House, the show's main character, often butted heads over treatment.

Dr. Charles divided the pharmaceutical industry into camps. "They're the nice pharmaceutical company," Dr. Charles said of a group that contributed medicine to his cause. And in an exercise of self-righteous guilt, Dr.



CBS's "CSI: Miami" cleaned the streets of weapons-trafficking CEOs and murdering insurance salesmen.

Charles refused to take critical medicine - in front of a press conference no less - because the sick in Africa couldn't afford it.

Dr. Charles used his illness and celebrity to leverage the pharmaceutical industry into being more "generous." Naturally, no one explained that the company couldn't continue curing diseases if it didn't have any profits to invest in its cures.

One CBS character even charged that drug companies were responsible for famine and death in sub-Saharan Africa. Paige, the young employee of a marketing firm, disappeared in the May 19 episode of CBS's "Without a Trace."

In "End Game," she hoped to help assassinate the rogue dictator of a third-world African nation. Paige claimed, "You know what the drug companies are doing about it ... They're overcharging for AIDS medications. They're doing experimental drug trials on kids - on kids, Beth!"

Although Paige's sister upbraided her and called her a hypocrite for working at large corporation, Paige answered, "At least I'm trying to help."

The pharmaceutical industry wasn't the only one under attack. CBS's "CSI: Miami" blamed the video game industry as the catalyst for a violent crime spree in Miami.

In the Nov. 21 episode, "Urban Hellraisers," Chris, the president of TransInternational, refused to cooperate with police after being told his video games were spurring a cult of teenagers to violence. "I have a board to answer to

... stockholders. My hands are tied," he said. Not only did the narrative blame the company's leadership for encouraging violence to sell more video games, but for trafficking in assault weapons.

On primetime television, corporations were just bigger businessmen-as-usual. With the exception of the Montecito Casino in NBC's "Las Vegas," big businesses did not advance society's standard of living or solve problems. They conspired to sell video games through reckless murder-for-marketing and held the bottom line in higher regard than the lives of the poor.

A Bright Spot

Two of NBC's primetime dramas challenged the anti-business template: "Las Vegas" and "Medium."

In "Medium," one of the main characters was an honest businessman, supportive husband and patient father. As for "Las Vegas," the Montecito Casino was staffed by a band of enterprising, creative and honest employees.

These two shows combined provided all nine of the positive business-related stories in the study.

NBC's "Las Vegas" was, by far, the most business-friendly production of the entire study period. All seven episodes in the sweeps periods of May and November 2005 were resoundingly pro-business at the character and plot levels.

Ed and Danny, in charge of security for the casino, were a departure from the stuffy, two-dimensional, suit-wearing criminals and adulterers in the universe of network television. And, the characters' creativity and dedication was used to the benefit of customers.



In NBC's "Las Vegas," the casino staff were enterprising and creative. The overbearing owner, however, met an unusual fate.

In the May 23 episode, "Centennial," Ed smoothed over concerns about a potential new buyer of the Montecito casino. As tension mounted about whether a buyer would make sweeping staff changes, he patiently reminded them "whoever buys the Montecito has the right to do whatever they choose." Casey, a wealthy investor and potential buyer, made veiled threats about changing the staff, especially to his ex-wife who was an employee.

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Monica, a former waitress turned widow and superheiress, became the Montecito's new owner. As businesswomen go, Monica left much to be desired. She was snippy, uncreative and overbearing. The November episodes adopted plots that demanded creative solutions to her poor decisions. However, that glaringly negative manifestation of a businesswoman met a quirky, if not humorous, fate.

In "Mothwoman," shown on Nov. 21, Monica was carried off the roof of the casino by a gust of wind. The following week's episode, "For Sail by Owner," opened with her "flight" across the Las Vegas strip and eventual crash through the window of a shoe store. In her will, Monica had left the Montecito to a charity for the blind. Not a bad exercise in redemption for a loathsome character.

"Medium" offered a mixed result of two anti-business and two pro-business episodes, and the character of Joe was a driving factor in the "pro-businessman" column. He was consistently patient with his wife's long hours and late nights at work for the Maricopa County Attorney's Office.

In the Nov. 21 episode, "Still Life," he was willing to pursue risks with a start-up engineering firm, before supernatural intervention encouraged a change of heart. He was also faithful.

Methodology

The Media Research Center's Business & Media Institute studied the 12 top-rated primetime dramas, based on the average of their Nielsen Media Research ratings, from the sweeps months of May and November 2005. This framework allowed for the analysis of 129 episodes from ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX programming.

Each episode was scoured for characters committing actions or making statements impugning businessmen or commerce. Whether the plot was deemed anti- or pro-business was determined by the composition of characters employed in the private sector and the detail of the narrative.

Businessmen were identified by the nature of their work. They were the risk takers. CEOs, managers, inventors, engineers, ad agents, private sector lawyers, and small business owners all fell under that definition.

An important characteristic these individuals shared in common was the usage of their skills and talents to meet demands in the marketplace. While they worked hard to fulfill essential roles, network television portrayed them as anything but heroes.

Conclusion

Everyone loves a good story, and these shows have a successful formula for entertainment, in light of their standing in the ratings. However, this study reveals an unfair portrayal of commerce and businessmen that usually isn't extended to government or to politically correct characters. This presents an inaccurate picture of reality and poisons the well for the viewing public.

Given the glaring absence of commerce or businessmen in 90 episodes, there's plenty of room for accommodation. In the episodes that addressed business, a stacked deck - by a factor of almost 4-to-1 - against a broad community responsible for great contributions to society betrays an entertainment community that is sorely out of touch with reality - and perhaps its audience.

Recommendations

While Hollywood's exaggeration of criminal businessmen might be good for the networks, it is bad for America. Research has shown the negative messages of TV can impact the attitudes of young viewers.

The constant parade of criminal CEOs and murdering MBAs on television can create a climate of mistrust in a basic institution of society. Network executives have a responsibility not to tear down the free enterprise system - the very system that enables their networks to succeed.

To that end, BMI has the following recommendations:

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