Channel Surfing

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Never underestimate the power of a few e-mails—or the pre-programmed conservatism of many television station directors. When marketing mavens at San Francisco's Better World Advertisingshelled out $170,000 in city health department funds to buy primo time on local channels for a new HIV prevention ad, they assumed they'd circumvented the 3 a.m. slots usually given to free public service announcements.

But KGO-TV, the local ABC affiliate, refused to run the spot—which features one transgendered woman and six bare-chested men with arms crossed over her breasts, all positive and all saying "HIV stops with me"—during *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, the agency's top picks based on market research. Then KBHK, the UPN affiliate, said it would only OK the ad during late-night repeats of *The Simpsons,* not the showings at 6 p.m., and Fox affiliate KTVU pre-empted a request to air the ad when the new season of the animated show began.

Their justification? "We have to take into consideration the fact that there are people out there who may be watching with their 6-year-old," KGO's David Metz told The San Francisco Chronicle. Better World's president, Les Pappas, had a one-word comeback: "Homophobia." He rallied friends and associates to e-mail the stations in protest. Within a week, every station had been "bombarded with e-mails," Pappas said, and they offered a compromise: prime-time events in lieu of daytime programming, which boosted the value of the original purchases by an estimated 25 percent. Now the spot will be seen during such big-ticket shows as *20/20*, The Practice and the season premiere of *Ally McBeal*. The only station not to shy away in the first place? NBC affiliate KRON, which will air the ad during *Will & Grace*.

(See the full ad at www.hivstopswithme.org.)

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