



How Independent Cable Net AXS is Rebranding Dan Rather

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If you're wondering how legendary newsman Dan Rather's show, *The Big Interview*-currently in its fifth season-fits into AXS's classic-rock programming niche, you probably haven't been watching it. Not only is *The Big Interview* one of the channel's top original series, its ratings continue to grow year-over-year and its demo closely mirrors AXS's target adults 25-54 demographic.

Pretty impressive for a guy who just celebrated his 86th birthday and is in the midst of a book tour for his latest book, *What Unites Us*.

"He loves music, and it comes through," says Dena Kaplan, head of marketing at AXS TV. "This is a long-running passion project of his, and we've tried to shape it and make it more targeted to our viewers and the types of artists they want to see and listen to. It's really the sweet spot of rock-and-roll. We go outside the lines a little bit, but that's really the target." [^]

That means booking guests working in, or tangential to, the music business to better fit the AXS brand. Upcoming guests include Steve Miller, Peter Frampton, R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe and Mike Mills, and Steven Van Zant.

As a small independent channel, marketing budgets are tight, so AXS likes to

leverage the social-media footprints of The Big Interview's guests, just as it does for the concerts, rock docs, and other programs it airs.Â

"A lot of these artists have big fan followings, so we're very nimble and try to capitalize on that," Kaplan says.

Stretching the marketing budget takes other forms, too.Â

"One of our stakeholders is CBS, so we have a partnership with them where we can leverage their TV and radio assets, so we did a buy to support [the fifth-season fall] premiere, which featured Sharon Osbourne," Kaplan says. "It was partly a market play for us to promote The Big Interview plus The X Factor UK because she's one of the judges on that. We got synergy between the two shows."

Kaplan says AXS went beyond its typical marketing efforts for The Big Interview by buying spots on CBS TV during the news-which Rather once anchored-and on The Talk, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, and The Late Late Show with James Corden.Â

"On the radio side we bought some news and mostly rock stations, letting people know the types of artists that are on the show. It was a nice, tight campaign," Kaplan says. "We also do a lot of co-opt marketing with our distributors."

Regular viewers may have noticed that AXS even gave Rather a mini-makeover this season, further shifting his iconic anchorman look to a looser, more casual style. Kaplan says Rather enjoyed the shoot, which comes across in the promos where he's rocking aviator-style shades.Â

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