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The Cover: *Featured on the cover are John Walsh, host of "America's Most Wanted," and Robert Stack, host of "Unsolved Mysteries." See article p. 1.*

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Crime-Time Television

By
SCOTT A. NELSON
Section Chief
Office of Public Affairs
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, DC

Americans live in an ever-changing electronic world where "one picture is worth a thousand words." One particular medium that has exerted a dominant influence over our society is television. Ninety-eight percent of all American homes have at least one television set which is turned on for more than 6 hours a day.[1]

TV has an almost mesmerizing power over viewers. It can captivate an audience to such an extent that it can influence public opinion and set public policy. Why? The answer is simple—television is everywhere. It is also entertaining, requires little effort, and presents information in both visual and audio terms.

Law enforcement agencies are just beginning to realize the full potential of this powerful medium and to use it to their advantage. In recent years, the law enforcement profession has joined forces with the TV media and, in turn, with the public to form a beneficial partnership. Weekly "crime-time" television shows have resulted in the apprehension of fugitives, the solution of difficult cases, and positive publicity for the law enforcement agencies involved.

This article discusses the development of crime-time television and its pros and cons. It also offers suggestions to the law enforcement manager who may be approached by a local or national network to participate in a crime-solving program.

Law Enforcement and the Printed Media

The FBI's "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives" list was law enforcement's first major union with the media. A newspaper story in 1949 led to the creation of the list after a reporter asked the FBI for the names and descriptions of the "toughest guys" the Bureau would like to capture. The story generated so much positive publicity that on March 14, 1950, former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover approved the "Most Wanted Fugitive" Program.

Special Agent Nelson

> ***"Two of the most popular shows, 'America's Most Wanted' and 'Unsolved Mysteries' have become potent law enforcement tools."***

The success of this program is well documented. Within the first year, 9 of the first 20 "Top Tenners" were arrested as a result of citizen tips. To date, information from citizens alone has led to the capture of 121 of the 426 "Top Ten" fugitives who have been added to the list. Obviously, the widespread publicity generated by the printed media worked. The value of citizen participation in capturing the mobile, elusive criminal cannot be questioned.

From Print to Picture Tube

During the 1960's and early 1970's, television crime dramas dominated the airwaves. One of the most popular was "The FBI," which is considered to be one of the top five longest running television series. The program starred Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., as Inspector Erskine and aired from 1965 to 1974. It occupied a highly coveted time slot—Sunday at 8:00 p.m.—considered by many to be the "family hour." The series dramatized actual FBI cases that had been solved.

In the wake of the Vietnam War, crime dramas became unpopular to American television viewers. An anti-establishment mentality prevailed, and this impacted dramatically on the public's perception of law enforcement.

However, in the early 1980's, a new FBI drama starring Mike Connors appeared on the television screen. "Today's FBI" portrayed the changes that had taken place not only within the organization but also within the criminal world. A female Agent and a black Agent joined the team to solve cases dealing with modern-day crime problems, such as white-collar crime and organized crime.

The two shows, "The FBI" and "Today's FBI," were solely to entertain the viewing public. The cases portrayed had already been solved; the perpetrators had been apprehended and convicted.

Crime-Time Television

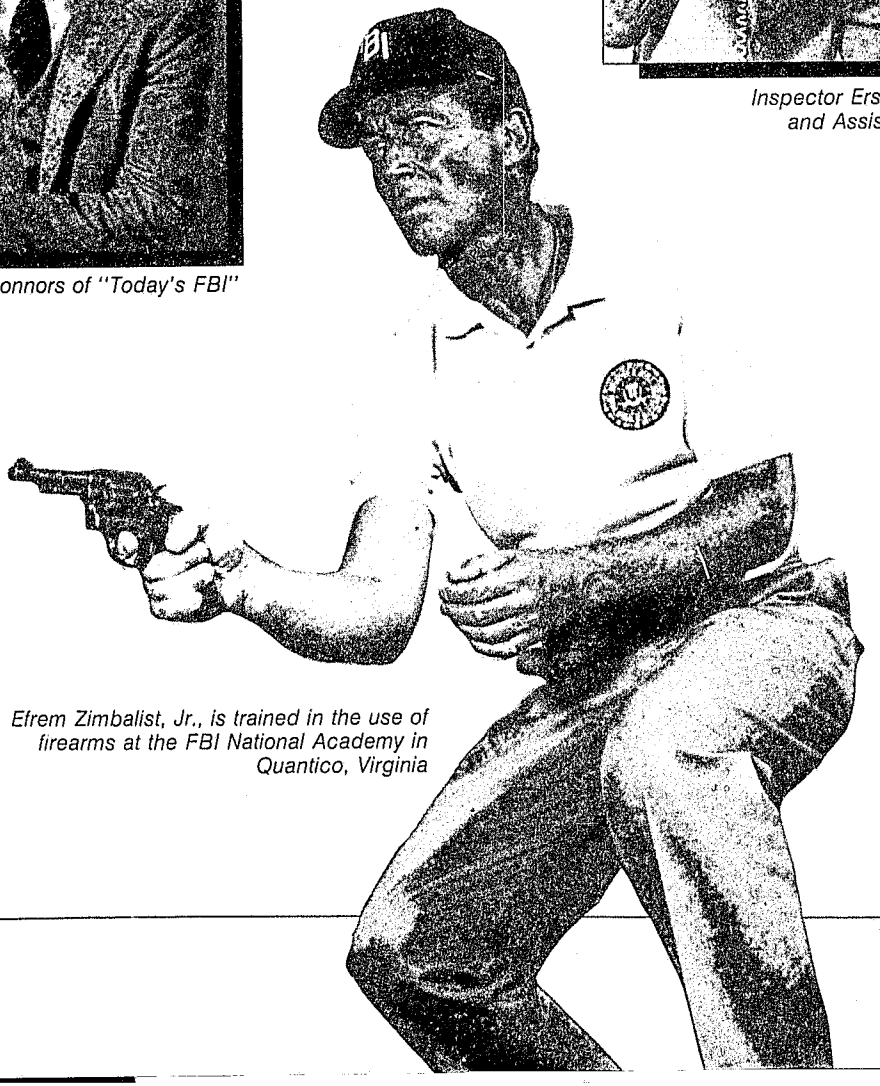
By the 1980's, there was a resurgence of public interest in crime dramas. Responding to viewers' demands, networks revamped their programming schedules. But, the television shows took on a new look—a new direction.

Dramatized, factual re-creations or "reality programming" now appear on the screen. Viewers are asked to help identify or locate criminals. Crime-time television has taken a premier position in modern-day programming.

Two of the most popular shows, "America's Most Wanted" (AMW) and "Unsolved Mysteries" (UM) have become potent law enforcement tools. They are basically a more visual and more interesting extension of the "Top Ten" Program that has captured America's attention since

Mike Connors of "Today's FBI"

Inspector Erskine (Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.) and Assistant Director Ward (Philip Abbott) of "The FBI"



Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., is trained in the use of firearms at the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia

the 1950's. While AMW centers on factual fugitive re-creations, UM's format is more varied, covering not only fugitives but also unsolved criminal cases and unexplained mysteries. Both shows factor in entertainment, and that, combined with the public's desire to help, accounts for the audience draw.

> ***Several other Federal agencies ... have also cooperated with the television industry to produce crime-time television shows and are reaping substantial benefits.***

However, according to Executive Producer Michael Linder, AMW puts the entertainment aspect into perspective:

> "We know our program is seen as entertainment by the many in our audience who are simply fascinated by the often bizarre behavior of criminals. But, shock, violence and horror are dramatic devices we choose to avoid. We want to stress human values. Our cases are often the stories of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary events and people whose lives have been touched profoundly by crime. We intend to depict their lives with compassion and understanding. In that way, we believe other viewers will be motivated to help out of sympathy to victims of violence."

AMW, hosted by John Walsh, whose son, Adam, was brutally murdered, premiered on February 7, 1988, on select Fox TV affiliates. Seen weekly by 12 to 15 million viewers, it is currently the number-one rated Fox television network show. Its popularity has boomed, and it now airs on 123 Fox-affiliated stations in major American cities.

John Walsh describes "America's Most Wanted" as a "weekly nationwide criminal manhunt." The show attempts to accurately reenact crimes at the actual scene whenever possible. However, only serious crimes which merit nationwide exposure and which can be solved with the public's help are reenacted.

"Unsolved Mysteries," created by NBC's entertainment division, is hosted by Robert Stack. According to Stuart Schwartz, coordinating producer,

> " 'Unsolved Mysteries' initiated the crime-solving genre in January, 1987, when our first episode aired. The show grew out of several TV specials we did called, 'Missing—Have You Seen This Person?' in which we profiled missing persons cases and asked our audience to call in to an 800 number with tips. The show resulted in reuniting 25 missing people with their families."

As of July 1989, UM has been credited with the solution of 26 cases, 17 of which were FBI cases. This past year, UM was rated the top new NBC series, viewed by approximately 30 million people every Wednesday night.

A Beneficial Partnership

Although crime-time television is common in such European countries as England, West Germany, and The Netherlands, the genre is still fairly new to the United States. Yet, the FBI has cooperated with certain crime-time television shows from the very beginning, recognizing the programs as unique opportunities to catch fugitives and solve cases through public/private involvement.

Several other Federal agencies, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the U.S. Customs Service, and local and State law enforcement agencies have also cooperated with the television industry to produce crime-time television shows and are reaping substantial benefits. According to Michael Linder:

> "We have worked with more than 95 law enforcement agencies in more than 130 cities and their cooperation has been simply astonishing. I see a new relationship emerging between law enforcement and the media. In the past, these organizations often engaged in adversarial politics, but at AMW, we believe we're creating a prototype which uses the strengths of each to accomplish a greater goal."

Stuart Schwartz adds:

> "Americans seem particularly concerned today with rising crime statistics. We believe that 'Unsolved Mysteries' creates an opportunity for national televi-

sion to work as a tool for law enforcement.... By cooperating with law enforcement agencies nationwide, we give case investigators an opportunity to be put directly in touch with those viewers having that one vital clue or piece of information that helps to solve a case.... We believe that television [and 'Unsolved Mysteries'] can be an effective partner in the fight against crime."

Behind the Scenes

Both shows are constantly probing for new stories—the lifeline of their programs. Each uses researchers to identify cases that can be developed into a segment of the show, although "cold calls" merely asking for leads have been made to police departments. However, with the programs' rising popularity, this is an infrequent occurrence. Stories selected are those that are serious, can be solved, and have interesting plots and sympathetic victims.

Once the case is chosen, and this may be done with or without the cooperation of the police department, the re-creation, or dramatization, begins. Real police officers/victims can be used, but often actors are hired. Departments may be asked to provide evidence, duty officers, police cars, equipment, or other real-life support for the episode. Pictures, plots, investigative theories, and poignant stories all become the "pegs" that make the story work. The media relies on the so-called "six C's": Catastrophe, crisis, conflict, crime, corruption and color, and to a degree, these programs are part of the larger TV game plan.[2]

South Florida's "Eye on Crime"

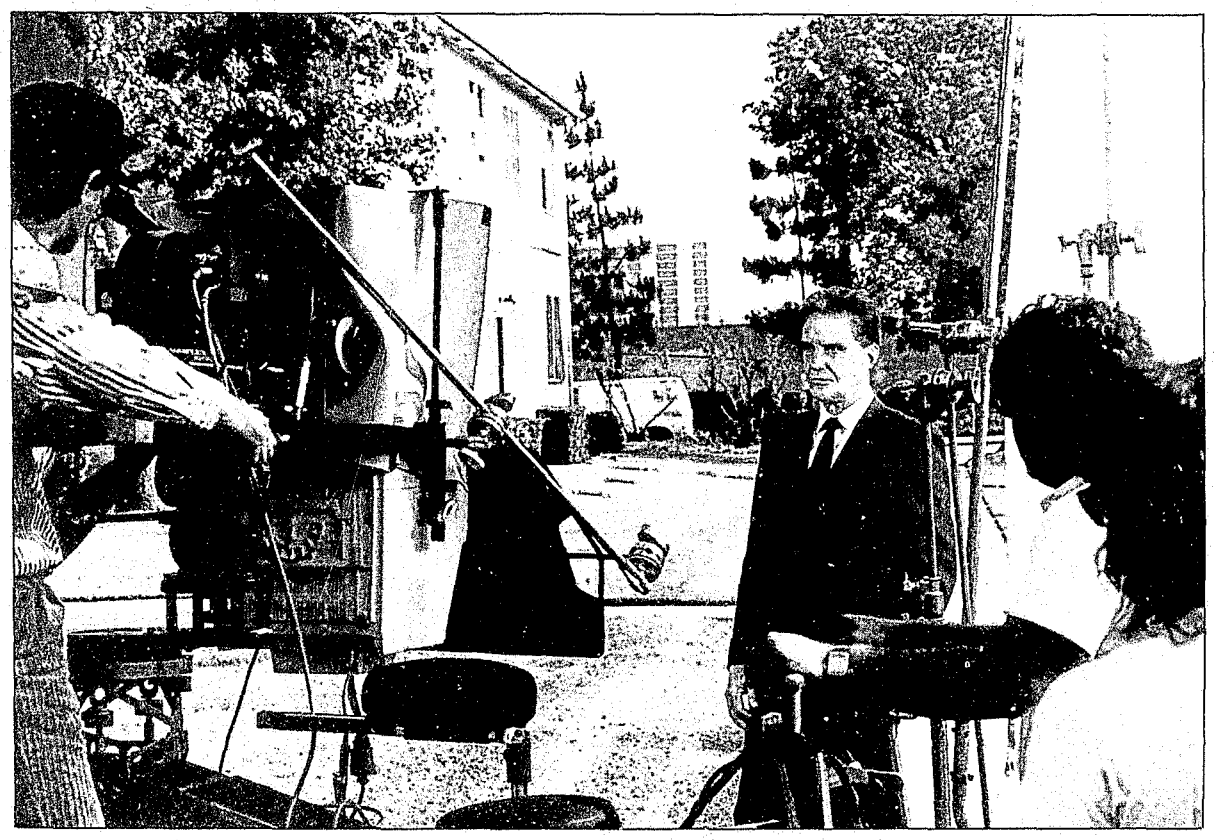
The "Eye on Crime," a locally produced crime-time television show, premiered at 8 p.m. on July 29, 1988, on WPLG Channel 10, a Post-Newsweek station and ABC affiliate in the Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, FL, area. The program is hosted by WPLG anchor, Dwight Lauderdale, with professional commentary from Police Commander Bill Johnson. The program is similar to other crime-time television shows in that it requests its viewers to help capture lawbreakers, has a call-in number (1-800-447-1030) and provides police detectives to respond to tips. But, its focus is not on reenactments. Instead, WPLG's cameras accompany the police units throughout South Florida and provide live footage of crimes in progress or use actual police video tape in their segments.

The first program featured a segment concerning a breaking-and-entering case. The police and camera crew responded to a 911 call from a woman who had fled her home upon hearing a burglar enter. The police then surrounded the house and were able to disarm and capture the burglar.

"Eye on Crime's" first program also featured a segment on the "Loan Bandit," a local male, who was wanted by both the local authorities and the FBI for several unique bank robberies. The "Loan Bandit" would "case" a bank, pretending to apply for a loan, and then return within a couple days with his loan application to rob the bank, ordering the teller to place large bills into his folded loan application. He would then leave the scene in a red Ford "Taurus" or Mercury "Sable."

On its first airing, the program earned an 8 rating and a 15 share. When it was telecast in its normal Sunday night time slot at 11:30 p.m., it drew a 9 rating and a 26 share, twice the normal Sunday rating. Program Manager, Sherry Burns, comments, " 'Eye on Crime' works because it's immediate and it's real—and nothing has a greater impact than that." She noted: "We called them in and told them what we wanted to do, what our goals were, and asked for their help." And, Broward County, FL, Sheriff Nick Navarro believes that "We in law enforcement have long recognized that our effectiveness is vastly increased when we have the support of the public at large."

As a result of "Eye on Crime's" first show, local police received viewer tips which led to arrest warrants being issued in one of the cases reported.



" '... we give case investigators an opportunity to be put directly in touch with those viewers having that one vital clue ... that helps to solve a case...' "
—Stuart Schwartz, "Unsolved Mysteries"

Characteristic of both programs are the call-in numbers and the availability of trained investigators to respond immediately to leads. AMW, for example, uses 1-800-CRIME89 and trained operators who relay tips to investigators in the studio.

Within this partnership, each player has a specific role. Feeding information to the public is the business of the television show; apprehending the fugitive or solving the case is left to law enforcement. To succeed, the solution or apprehension must be done quickly, so too must lead differentiation. Several thousand calls come in—some from cranks, some from well-meaning but not helpful citizens, and some from people with vital information. All need to be screened so that the good leads can be immediately identified and covered. A workable system is essential.

The TV program, the law enforcement agency, and the public all benefit when fugitives are caught and cases solved. Certainly, each program provides a distinct public service, but at the same time, the networks are in the business to make money. They must maintain a certain audience share and attract advertisers. To do this, they must bring cases to a successful conclusion. Statistics are important, and departments should be careful to give credit where credit is due. As a general rule, a bona fide tip doesn't have to lead directly to the fugitive, or case solution, but it must be a catalyst, or important link, to that process.

" 'I see a new relationship emerging between law enforcement and the media.' "
—Michael Linder, "America's Most Wanted"

Pros and Cons

There is no question that crime-time television works! AMW, for example, has featured over 166 wanted fugitives, 125 of whom are FBI fugitives. The results of this coverage are staggering: 78 FBI fugitives were taken into custody, 9 of which were "Top Ten" fugitives. Of the "Top Ten" captures, five were a direct result of AMW's coverage of the crime.

One of those captured from an AMW viewer tip was David James Roberts, who was wanted for rape, multiple murders, and escape from a State prison. At the time, Roberts was working in a homeless shelter in New York City earning $18,000 per year. During a stay in the hospital for a stomach illness, Roberts saw himself profiled on television. He then quietly checked himself out and went into hiding. However, as a result of the many telephone calls and leads derived from the program, a 12-man FBI team captured Roberts 4 days later on Staten Island.

These television programs also have other benefits outside of solving cases and apprehending fugitives. They help to revive citizen cooperation with law enforcement and provide an outlet for citizens to voice their frustrations concerning the ever-increasing crime rate.

Increasingly, in today's society, many people are forced to live in areas infested with various criminal activity. This is taking its toll in fear, vigilantism, and death. These programs give citizens an

appropriate outlet and a means to cooperate with law enforcement in the fight against crime.

According to Michael Linder:

> "I believe we are witnessing the birth of a new era in citizen involvement. 'America's Most Wanted' has organized some 22 million viewers into the first nationwide neighborhood watch association. Our viewers are keeping a sharp eye out for crime and for fugitives. Since our premiere, we have logged well over 100 thousand tips which we have turned over to proper authorities. Americans are fed up with crime, and want to do something about it."

Also, crime-time television can help to reinforce and/or establish a much needed, long overdue union between law enforcement and the media. Too often, police agencies are cast as ineffective or insensitive, so a positive working relationship with media representatives can do nothing but help an agency's reputation.

A side argument can be made that quick apprehension of dangerous fugitives reduces crime by cutting back on recidivism, which is a recognized trademark of career criminals. In fact, a recent study based on 16,000 prisoners released from State prisons in 11 States found that 62.5% were rearrested for a felony or a serious misdemeanor within 3 years. Forty-seven percent of these were reconvicted and 41% were returned to prison or jail.[3] These criminals are the focus of crime-time television—the dangerous repeat criminals and serious offenders—those who pose the greatest public risk and those whose capture might result from widespread publicity.

However, with all the benefits that can be derived from crime-time television, the law enforcement manager should also be cognizant of the drawbacks. Certain sensitive issues, because they might affect the disposition of the case, must be considered before a department enters into an agreement with a network to produce a crime-time television show.

One very significant consideration is pretrial publicity. Losing a case in court because of the publicity received on a crime-time TV program negates the value of a fugitive apprehension or case solution. Then there is the issue of third-party privacy, which must be respected at all times.

Another point to remember is that a primary objective of a network is to capture the largest share of the viewing audience. Its existence depends on it. Thus, many may resort to depictions of gratuitous violence, which peak public interest. This can be counterproductive, since it can lead to charges of sensationalism and tabloid TV, which are offensive to most. More importantly, however, this detracts from the credibility of the network and the police agency involved, and therefore, should be avoided.

Finally, vigilantism, copy cat crimes, exposure of sensitive techniques, informants or cases, and civil liability can also result from crime-time television.

"Ninety-eight percent of all American homes have at least one television set and that set is turned on for more than 6 hours a day."

What To Do If Approached By Crime-Time Television

Every law enforcement manager should give serious thought to *all* of the issues before a commitment to become involved in the production of crime-time television is made. Granted, the decision is not an easy one! However, the following points will assist in making the right choice:

- Weigh the pros and cons, the advantages and the disadvantages. In effect, do a quick cost-benefit analysis.
- Make case selections carefully. Choose cases that will benefit from widespread publicity.
- Consider public impact. Will the case prompt the public to take action? Does it have an unusual twist or peg that will capture the public's attention?
- Consider the effect on current investigative efforts. Will the widespread publicity hinder or side-track the investigation? However, always remember that a network may proceed

without a department's assistance, especially if it involves a controversial case and public information is available.

- Consult with departmental legal advisers and the prosecutor.
- Designate a staff member to act as liaison. This individual should be familiar with the case and know how to work with the media.
- Establish working rules with the program's executives. Define what is acceptable and what is not. For example, who has film editorial review authority—the TV producer or the law enforcement agency? Will the network cancel or alter the program if it is determined the case will be adversely affected? Where will the filming take place? Who will be filmed—on-duty personnel, witnesses, etc? Will the evidence be compromised if shown on television?
- Establish a catchy call-in number—one that can be easily remembered.
- Staff the call-in number with trained investigators so that all vital information received can be acted upon immediately.
- Keep track of successes. If a tip results in a fugitive capture or case solution, credit the show and make note of time saved and public benefit derived. Hold a press conference or issue a press release. *Inform the public of all accomplishments!*

Conclusion

Today, we are witnessing the birth of a new era in citizen involvement in fighting crime. Americans now realize that they do not have to be passive victims of crime. Rather, they can be active participants in the criminal justice system.

Television will be a strong link between law enforcement, the media, and the public well into the 21st century. By getting citizens involved, law enforcement and the television media have tapped a viable investigative resource. Used properly, this resource can be invaluable to every police department's crime fighting activities.

However, law enforcement needs to know how to use the television medium to its fullest potential. One way is to cooperate with networks to produce crime-time television programs. The value of such programs has been proven. Cases have been solved; fugitives have been apprehended; positive publicity has been generated. Crime-time television has made a difference. FBI

Crooks Catch a Crook

Mark Austin Goodman, booked under the alias of James R. Eide, was serving a 75-day sentence for a burglary charge at a minimum security stockade. On Sunday, May 15, 1988, inmates of the stockade were watching "America's Most Wanted" on the Fox Television network. Goodman was portrayed on the program as one of the U.S. Marshal's Top Ten Fugitives. These same inmates recognized Goodman as being James R. Eide, a fellow inmate.

The inmates learned from the segment that Goodman was wanted for 10 bank robberies in Oklahoma, 6 escapes (1 from a Federal prison) and numerous other charges in 4 States. The inmates then reported Goodman to prison officials, who called the hotline. This tip was 1 of 274 from people from across the country who thought they knew Goodman.

The corrections officers, in order to guard against his escape, decided to transfer Goodman to a more secure jail. He never made it. Goodman escaped from his captors by scaling a fence around the stockade. The U.S. Marshal's office in West Palm Beach then initiated a search. Goodman was arrested by Jupiter, FL, authorities on May 16, 1988, and turned over to U.S. Marshals.

Footnotes

[1]Wicke Chambers and Spring Asher, *TV PR: How to Promote Yourself, Your Product, Your Service or Your Organization on Television* (Rockland, CA: Prima Publishing & Communications, 1987), p. 16.

[2]Clarence Jones, *How to Speak TV: A Self-Defense Manual When You're the News* (Miami, FL: Kukar and Co., Inc., 1983), p. 62.

[3]Verified with Mr. Allen Beck, Bureau of Justice Statistics.