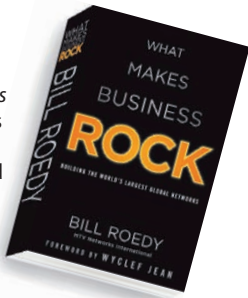


*What Makes Business Rock* by Bill Roedy is published by John Wiley & Sons, priced £18.99. ISBN: 978-1118004760



try and take two kinds of books with me on holiday – a novel (with the aim of prising my mind open to the world beyond television), and a more media-related title that I hope will inspire me on my return to the office two weeks later.

Despite the cheesy title, Bill Roedy's *What Makes Business Rock* falls very much into the latter category and I highly recommend it to *Television* readers as they set off for the beach this summer.

Roedy is a genuine legend of international television. He is the man who led MTV from a tiny office in Camden to quite literally scale the Berlin Wall, the Great Wall of China and hundreds of territories in between.

MTV was the Facebook of its day (see article on page 24), a company that brought down dictatorships, or was at least at the after-party.

By the time he was 30 Roedy had graduated from the elite West Point Military Academy, led a platoon in Vietnam, been in charge of

created new capacity that needed filling with channels to justify the monthly subscriptions – and the cheaper the better.

Hence the idea of channels built around music promos donated by record companies. This was also very much how it was in the early days of multichannel in the UK, when the platforms were so keen for channel brands to differentiate their offerings.

MTV, Discovery and CNN were the pioneering brands that grew around the world as the new pay-platforms rolled out.

One half of Roedy's professional life was to strike thousands of distribution deals with all the new international platforms between the 1980s and the mid-2000s. The other half was all about the brand.

Having built the distribution, Roedy and his colleagues then set about crafting a brand. They took great care that this should not feel too American and that it stood for a universal ideal of youth.

Roedy is thoughtful about the right balance

# Generation MTV

David Abraham reads how **Bill Roedy** set about enthusing a generation to watch and work for his consciously internationalist channels

a strategic nuclear defence base in Italy and gained an MBA from Harvard. All this gives some idea of the scale of his capabilities.

He cut his teeth in TV in the early days of HBO before being recruited to build MTV outside the US in the late 1980s. Once he arrived in London, he never returned to live again in the US.

I suspect his innate internationalism was core to the global success of MTV and, in my experience, a rare quality among that generation of US multichannel pioneers.

For Roedy's MTV was a global citizen as much as a US creation. Here was a man who really did build his international network by hand. He physically crisscrossed and glad-handed planet earth and its political and business leaders incessantly for more than 25 years. This book tells you how he did it and in the process created billions of dollars of value.

The reader soon discovers that Roedy's impressive formula of internationalism and cause-related brand-building comes from the stern stuff he was taught at West Point.

Here he learned about the importance of making quick and firm decisions, delegation, camaraderie, morale building and immense physical fitness. It's this unusual blend of influences that I'm sure were the foundation of his prolonged success.

In part, this book provides a useful history of how the whole concept of thematic TV adapted symbiotically with the development of early multichannel distribution platforms.

HBO, for example, was created as part of a cable system that was compensating for a lack of decent TV signals due to all the tall buildings in Manhattan. Cable companies

between command and control, and local autonomy. Throughout the book he talks engagingly on this topic.

Part of the formula was that every new MTV office brimmed with young, enthusiastic staff. They were working in a new and fast-growing part of the media and "didn't need much of an excuse to have a party". Here was a leader for whom the motto "work hard, play hard" was meant.

Another key factor was his clear talent for talent.

The obligatory photo section of the book has Roedy hanging out with everyone from Bono, Macca and Mick to the Dalai Lama, Mandela and Ban Ki Moon. Even the foreword is written by Wyclef Jean.

Roedy makes you dizzy with his appetite for moving and shaking. He makes no secret of the fact that MTV's industrial-scale levels of buzz, fun and entertainment kept him very engaged throughout.

He does, however, scotch the myth that he had an affair with Naomi Campbell.

Of course MTV had to evolve creatively, too. The early period of relying on free music videos developed into a more full-blown general entertainment offering, which spawned the ubiquitous *Beavis and Butthead*, *South Park* and *The Osbournes*.

This ability to work from the core of youth-appeal via music but spreading outwards into general entertainment continues to this day.

It is also a formula that has attracted local competition. For example, at Channel 4, 4Music combines highly editorialised music with youth entertainment programmes such as *Balls of Steel*, and has become the UK's biggest



music channel. You'll discover some surprising facts in this book. Originally, MTV was almost called TVM; 50% of MTV Europe was once owned by Robert Maxwell (and 25% by BT); and Bruce Gyngell sold the TV-am building to MTV for a paltry £3.2m.

Roedy's struggles with copyright tribunals have had a lasting impact on the shape of the music industry. This part of the story also provides a useful background to anyone involved today in the continuing debate between artists and distributors in a post-Napster age.

Readers will also be moved by Roedy's clear passion to put the MTV brand to work in areas many media executives stay away from, such as HIV/AIDS awareness, disaster relief and human rights.

Roedy is clearly a poster-child of the boomer cohort that included Anita Roddick and Bob Geldof, who wanted to use business to change the world.

But then, in a Darwinian way, a new, geekier generation arrived that didn't want to play ball with what they labelled "traditional media".

The later chapters tell the story of how, in the most recent decade, MTV fought to com-

pete with a new generation of web-based youth brands.

It invested in games companies and tried to buy Myspace in 2007. But essentially the generation that spurred its early days has been replaced by an equally fickle one wrapped up in a world of YouTube and Facebook.

These brands seriously challenge the prior centrality of MTV in the lives of the young. *Jersey Shore* might be a great ratings success but I suspect today's leaders at MTV are looking afresh to find new ways to get their content to resonate with youth audiences.

It's interesting that scripted British formats, such as *Skins* and *Inbetweeners*, are one place they are looking for inspiration.

A few years ago, I had the pleasure of spending an afternoon with Roedy and talking to him about the work I was doing at the time to rebrand UKTV's portfolio of channels. It was clear to me that branding, teamwork and hard work were very central to what made him tick as an executive.

His respect for excellent people and how to realise individual talent shines through this book. So does a very sound grasp of the responsibilities of leadership.

But, by his own admission, he was a business builder, not a maintainer, and last year stepped down from MTV after 22 years to write this book and focus on his many cause-related global projects. I'm sure he'll be missed up there in Camden and in the many offices he built around the world. □

David Abraham is chief executive of Channel 4.

**David Abraham**  
CEO, Channel 4

**That boomer cohort... wanted to use business to change the world. But then... a new, geekier generation arrived that didn't want to play ball with what they labelled 'traditional media'**

**Bill Roedy with Will Smith and Nelson Mandela and (inset) Paul McCartney**