

Judith Zaylor addresses European audiences on film, WBTV's preferred choice

Warner Bros. Television (WBTV) has held the position of highest volume US producer of dramas and sitcoms for prime-time television for many years, with shows such as *Friends*, *Without A Trace*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Smallville* and *Cold Case* becoming household names. It is one of only two independent production companies that sell shows to every US broadcaster.

On average, WBTV captures 70% of its productions on film, but in 2007 the figure reached 79% when it was the preferred choice for 15 of the company's 19 series, including the very successful *ER*, *Two and a Half Men*, *Chuck* and *Pushing Daisies*. *ER*, which is shot in 35mm, is currently WBTV's only show in 4-perf. The company has used 3-perf widely since 1989.

In her third decade in production and her 21st year with WBTV, Judith Zaylor has taken on an advisory and consultancy role following seven years as Executive Vice-President, Production when she supervised the day-to-day running of production operations in television series, telefilms and miniseries, holding responsibility for costs and logistics. At the time of her appointment, she was the only woman to oversee television production in a major American studio.

The highly-respected production doyen undertook a recent Kodak-sponsored European trip to address producers, line producers and television broadcasters in Madrid, Rome, Munich, Berlin, Paris and London. She discussed television workflow in the US, current and predicted trends in US television, and fielded her audiences' many and varied questions.

"I've had the benefit of overseeing very large volumes of production at WBTV and seeing the company experiment with different ways of producing shows," says Zaylor. "Production demands have increased considerably and the way we do our business is currently undergoing



change. Today's audiences, particularly young people, need much more stimulation in order to maintain their interest, so we use many more camera angles. On *Dallas* there was only one camera for the most part and we never used a crane; now we always use cranes and shoot with two cameras and shows that don't appear to have visual effects or CGI do have them."

"We used to have three or four script pages to a scene; now we might have only two-eighths or one-eighth of a page. Nevertheless, a recent half-page sequence in *Pushing Daisies* took eight hours to shoot. A friend from Fox summed it up: 'It's no longer two people talking and the reaction shots. It's how the chair sees me, how I see the chair and what it looks like from the floor.'"

"WBTV has been archiving the cut negative since 1990 and I believe ours is the largest HD ready library in the world for television shows. One show that cuts the neg for broadcast is *ER*. After cutting, it's immediately transferred to the format that goes to the broadcaster. Then it is sent to the archive for future sales. In other shows we transfer film to a digital format, for example we did all the

post production on *Moonlight* in HD. We got the visual effects, titling and stock shots done during the offline process, which made it easier to deliver the show more quickly," says Zaylor.

"We used to produce 20 to 25 pilots between January and April to see if the networks would pick them up for series. However, the long 2007/2008 writers' strike prevented us from having the normal number of pilots as it occurred when writers were due to submit their scripts. As a result, we only ended up with seven pilots, but four were picked up - which is a very good proportion. It all worked out just fine, so for creative and cost control reasons we may be changing our approach."

"We have to be able to sell our product in future markets and for reasons of longevity we always try to shoot on film. After all, it can be transferred to any known format now and in the future," concludes Zaylor.