

CARAT'S 'DVR-PROOF' PROGRAMMING DIRECTOR Michael Yudin Likes TV Networks as Partners

By [Lisa Sanders](#)

Who: Michael Yudin, director of Carat Entertainment, a unit of Aegis Group's Carat Americas.

Why you need to know him: Based out of New York, Mr. Yudin is the go-to-guy for media agency Carat when it comes to producing branded entertainment for the company's clients.



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Credentials: After graduating from Boston's Emerson College in 1972, Mr. Yudin, a communications theory major, landed a job at NBC as a part-time page. "It was an 18-month deal: Either you landed a job somewhere in the company or you were out," recalls Mr. Yudin, who ended up in sales. From there, he moved into media buying, working on the accounts of Coca-Cola and Miller Beer at McCann Erickson and later, Backer & Spielvogel. He formed Chelsea Communications in 1984, which produced an early branded entertainment program, "Eat to Win," a home video sponsored by Red Lobster. From 1988-93, he worked for Alan Landsburg Productions (*Kate & Alley*, *Gimme a Break*) and then opened a cable unit, Reeves Cable Productions. One of the first programs Mr. Yudin developed was a late-night sports wrap-up show for Miller. In 1993, he joined Viacom as senior vice president for sponsored programming. In 1996, Mr. Yudin moved to Montreal-based Telescene Entertainment as president. Notable deals there included *Student Bodies* for Fox and *The Lost World*

for New Line. After a stint as president of Magnum Productions, a unit of sports-and-entertainment management company Magnum Sports & Entertainment, he started MY Entertainment, a production, packaging and consulting company. Recent credits include *John Cleese on Wine for the Confused* for the Food Network, *The Bar Mitzvah of Comedy Central* for Comedy Central and *AutoRox* for Spike TV.

What is Carat Entertainment trying to do? Carat Entertainment is a newly created group with a mission to develop digital-video-recorder-proof programming through integrated marketing messages that will increase brand awareness and sales of our clients' products. Unlike similarly focused units of other media agencies (such as WPP's MindShare Entertainment and Omnicom's Full Circle Entertainment) Carat Entertainment reports into Carat's national broadcast group, headed by Andy Donchin, executive producer and director for national broadcast. The unit will not operate as a production company but will develop programming for clients that third-party

companies will produce. It will also accept pitches from outside producers or creatives for projects that might appeal to the company's clients. "The network group is a partner with the client in deciding and implementing the strategy, and Andy has such close relationships with the selling community that we believe this structure gives our clients the best strategic opportunities and optimizes efficiency," Mr. Yudin said.

Why does branded entertainment appeal to you? "I spent 15 years at ad agencies, then 15 years in programming and production. I can use all my experiences in these areas and bring them to our clients. TV is the center, but the bigger picture is to take the TV show and blow it out to all other platforms -- cable, DVD, VOD [video on demand], licensing and gaming. Carat is the largest independent media buyer in the world, and we intend to take advantage of that for our clients, globally."

Who are Carat's clients? Procter & Gamble Co., Pfizer, Adidas, Philips, Hyundai Motors' Hyundai and Kia, Black & Decker and Boston Market.

Is branded entertainment new or old? "It's been around since radio. The difference now is the proliferation of channels and the arrival of new technologies, which means that advertisers have to find a way to get their message across in conjunction with a 30-second commercial. Due to economic and technological changes, the world has become more receptive to branded entertainment."

What is the biggest issue in branded entertainment today? "Clearly there needs to be some sort of metrics so that advertisers know what value they're getting from a deal. It's being addressed, but as of yet, to no one's satisfaction."

What's your philosophy on branded entertainment? "David Verklin, CEO of Carat Americas, likes to say I have a Swiss passport. I don't look for exclusivity with a network or a supplier. We start with the client's need, then go to the creative community to try to develop a show to meet that need. A lot of agencies have left the networks as the third man out, but I'm a big believer in working closely with the networks. They still do the lions' share of development and are the gatekeepers as to what gets on the air."

What kinds of projects are you looking for? "The big idea that can travel, have a long life. I would love to get our clients in early on comedies and drama."

What's the best form of networking you've used? New to New York City and working as a page for NBC, Mr. Yudin always kept two tickets to *Saturday Night Live* in his back pocket. "I didn't know anyone. It was a great way to get a date. I've lived here since 1972."

Who is your mentor? "Steve Leff, former head of media at McCann Erickson. He was one of the six founders of Backer Spielvogel. I've worked for him three different times over the years. He is credited with creating the concept of product exclusivity. One day, Budweiser woke up and found they couldn't advertise on *Monday Night Football*. That

led Budweiser to make an exclusive relationship with ESPN. Hence the beginning of the beer, cola and other wars. It was a fun time.”

What are you most proud of? His marriage of 30 years to Robin, and his two children, a 25-year-old-daughter who is director of finance for the Democratic party in Pennsylvania, and a son, soon to graduate from Vanderbilt University and enter the Teach for America program.

Where can you be found when you're not working? “On the golf course. It’s much more frustrating than my job.”

What are the best golf courses you've played? Pebble Beach and Pinehurst No. 2.