



INSIGHT REPORT



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K7.Media

Game Shows: Before, during & after Covid-19

Game Shows:

Introduction	3
1. How To Win At Game Shows In a Post-Covid World	7
a) Get lucky with a Covid-ready game show you prepared earlier	7
b) Reflect the mood	8
c) Scale it all down a bit	11
d) Do it without a studio audience	12
e) Use green screen or CGI effectively	14
f) Take the chance to experiment with remote playalong... but don't rush the technology	15
g) Be inspired by the constraints	19
2. The Key Gameshows Trends - and How Covid-19 Will or Won't Affect Them	20
a) Musical guessing games	20
b) Standing in for sports: funny, physical & supersized kids games	23
c) The 'human experiment' games	28
d) Diverse Twists	33
e) 'Last man standing' whittle-down	34
f) Beat the... channel/ host/ celebrity / sponsors	37
g) Best of the Best: Celebrations, Revivals and 'Ultimate' Tests	38

Introduction

Welcome to **K7's Insight Report: Game Shows**

In last month's World Entertainment and Reality Report we looked at how play-along games and quizzes were becoming more popular during lockdown.

There has certainly been a resurgence in the genre in the current situation but the varieties of game show we turn to are always shifting and changing – influenced by fashions, broadcaster economics, the general mood, technology, and certain production practicalities, especially now. With audiences looking for escapist entertainment and buyers worldwide looking for shows which can be safely and economically made, the game show genre seems worthy of its own in-depth report this month.

We start by looking at why they may prove to be the 'hero genre' of a post-Covid TV landscape, and then at several ways your particular game show can 'win' in that landscape. In the second half of the report we'll provide a comprehensive overview of current game shows on the market, the key game show trends that pre-dated Covid, and how they may (or may not) be affected.

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“Games and quiz have been the heroes of lockdown!” says **Glenn Hugill**, MD of UK production company Possessed, makers of game shows *5 Gold Rings*, *Cash Trapped*, *The Switch* and *Catchpoint*. (Hugill was also the Exec Producer and Banker on the British version of *Deal or No Deal*).



“It’s an exciting time for quiz right now. *Beat the Chasers* did well; *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?* is back; *Catchpoint* got its highest ever ratings; *Celebrity Mastermind*... they’ve all done brilliantly. Now every newspaper is telling you how to host your own quiz in lockdown – all generations are playing them again. People want to watch and participate.”

But for him this is just the latest chapter in a long, slow march back to primetime for a genre that went out of fashion, with only the occasional *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?*-style revival.

“For a long time quizzes weren’t considered cross-generational – they were only for the daytime audience, even though once they had been for everybody, in primetime. Perhaps it was decided that younger generations weren’t expected to be able to remember facts – memorising is dead, just google it! – so instead we had lots of challenge shows.

“But it’s rare that something doesn’t cycle back round again eventually, and so now games have become the number one form of entertainment in the world again. Everything is play-along - the most successful dramas are police cases you can guess along with, music talent shows are now guessing games – it’s all about the kudos of solving it first. And Q&A is back in primetime.”

For those producers and rights holders active in this space, a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic can, conversely, bring unexpected rewards.

“This is of course a small silver lining to a very big cloud, but we have been quite blessed to be working in a genre that is relatively deliverable right now, compared to some” says Hugill.

David Flynn, co-founder of *Small Fortune* producers youngest Media agrees. “Game shows have always been a focus for us, but even more so now, when people are wanting escapist entertainment that can be safely delivered. We’re definitely getting more interest in what our next thing in that area might be, for as soon as studios are ready for them.”



It’s not just game shows that fall into this category, but they are certainly in that bucket of genres which are potentially make-able, and affordable right now. Says **Vasha Wallace**, EVP of Global Acquisitions and Development at Fremantle: “We’re seeing more interest in all the shows we have which can be shot in studio or an enclosed environment in a controlled way – formats like *Four Rooms* or *The Recording Studio* are also very ‘Covid-friendly’. Different territories are at different stages. Asia is opening up, but is still under certain restrictions. The Nordics are getting back to some semblance of normality, but everyone is still being respectful of the need to work under the necessary guidelines.”



There does seem to be a clear consensus that, for now, game shows are going to tick a lot of boxes for buyers – even if the current situation does present some unique challenges. **Simon Ingram**’s US, France and UK-based company Ionoco powers many of the interactive elements of the biggest game shows - from *The Wall* to *Spin the Wheel* and *Mental Samurai*. Their latest task has been to drive a complex, ‘at home’ version of *Hollywood Game Night* for NBC.

“This is a real opportunity for the game show genre - when things get sticky they tend to bubble up, thanks to being per-minute cheaper than many genres, and able to provide light relief. But there are also the challenges of ensuring they’re fair - which is certainly harder out of studio, in homes.”



Luckily for the TV industry, some of the sharpest brains in the business are those involved in developing game shows, and during quarantine, time saved on

commuting, meetings and office chit-chat has been redirected towards creative problem-solving and devising.

Says **David Flynn** “Time has definitely been freed up for development, with fewer meetings than you have in an office. Our team is still getting on with it, even remotely. Luckily they are very game show literate, so they can usually have a chat about an idea, one person goes off to play it and they come back together to discuss it again.”

In France, **Aurelian Lipiansky**, CEO at production company Tooco (*Guess My Age*) and creator of *Divided*, has discovered the same. “We also found that working from home worked very well, whether in France or abroad, and we were able to have longer and more concrete talks than usual because everyone had more time to devote to us.”



Simon Ingram is at the receiving end of a lot of that thinking. “Creatives are all stuck at home with lots of time to be creative, so we’re getting a lot of calls! We’re not running at full strength ourselves so it’s challenging to help them all think through stuff, but we’re trying.”

Buyers have been at home too, and for a short time at least, this has meant a real opening up of cross-territory, virtual pitching of new ideas. **David Flynn** has seen this as a real window of opportunity – whether or not it lasts.

“Buyers are still definitely wanting to hear pitches, and are aware that they are going to need stuff quickly to fill some holes. What the situation has meant is that the boundaries between UK and international have gone. We’ve been able to pitch to ProSieben in Germany, and to the US via video conference just as easily as in the UK, whereas before we would have had to make a big trip. That has been really helpful.”

Ironically, despite the lack of markets, travel and face-to-face meetings, international creativity, conversation and pitching is perhaps more feasible, and active, than it has ever been.

This fact may also have a direct impact on the types of shows being developed and pitched – particularly in the game show area, where concepts are notoriously difficult to convey succinctly without a visual hook, or some form of interaction and gameplay. **Simon Ingram** advises “It’s worth considering which types of game show idea are easier to pitch virtually. Some that are very visual and immersive actually work well remotely, but if you need technology to play it at the buyer end it’s going to be tricky on Zoom!”

At this point a lot of the creative conversations are going to be driven by production practicalities and what is feasible under current, and rapidly changing guidelines.

Says **Vasha Wallace** at Fremantle “There has been lots of creative thinking around how we make shows in this ‘new normal’ – it’s forcing us to make choices we might not have made before and try things we might not have tried before, with the support of broadcasters. *American Idol* has been doing well

with its 'at home' performances, but there's no doubt that those shows will return to a studio environment – one that's made safe for participants and crew."

Those production challenges currently require just as much creativity to solve as the concepts themselves, and the solutions are evolving incredibly rapidly. As **Simon Ingram** says "*At the Hollywood Game Night 'wrap', someone said 'it's great to be involved in the future of television' and that is a bit what it feels like. Recent editions of shows like*



Gold Rush: The Dirt, Graham Norton, American Idol - they've all delivered new forms of TV with a very short turnaround. They've all done it slightly differently, and the innovation will continue, but there will be increasing emphasis on the production values. And those values are higher in entertainment - you'll forgive a bad video call on the news, but not on a big entertainment show. And sound is key - audiences will forgive a fuzzy shot, but bad audio is an instant turn-off."

For those who can turn the constraints to their advantage and be ready with the right game show ideas, this could turn out to be a fruitful time. As **David Flynn** says, "*We need to keep our development broad for the good of the business, but we are definitely focusing on what is feelgood, deliverable and can be done quickly, and game shows are a big part of that.*"

Below are a few key considerations for buyers, producers and creators of gameshows in 2020...

1. How To Win At Game Shows In a Post-Covid World

a) GET LUCKY WITH A COVID-READY GAME SHOW YOU PREPARED EARLIER

In the strange lottery of the coronavirus pandemic, some producers have been 'luckier' than others. Says **Glenn Hugill**, "It just happened that our new *Sitting on a Fortune* game show format has contestants sat in studio 2 metres apart! So that should be ok."

According to reports, ITV has now commissioned a seven-part series of the Gary Lineker-fronted format - still waiting to shoot later this year, thanks to the lockdown delays. In the show, six players compete for a cash prize. The contestants must select their position from a queue of chairs. The player at the front is asked questions, while the player at the back selects the categories. If they answer correctly, they remain where they are. A wrong answer sends them to the back of the line and everyone else moves one place forward. The player that answers the crucial last question correctly wins the jackpot.

With what is starting to look like a spooky knack for predicting the future, *Possessed's* other recent game show launch, *The Switch* (ITV, November 2019) was made with no set – just Sanjeev Baskar filmed in front of a representation of a set on a giant TV screen, all by remote cameras (no cameramen).



As Hugill says: "It was quite basic – not the kind of elaborate CGI look you get when they report the election results from a CGI Houses of Parliament or anything. We did it to prove that you could deliver a high quality product at half the cost of other shows in that slot. You got 90% of what you would want to get in that kind of show, but for 50% of the outlay. We didn't know this situation was coming, but now it turns out to have been a very useful exercise."

Other format creators and game show producers have also been quick to highlight and adapt the make-ability of certain shows in their catalogue. Justin Scroggie's *The Format People*, for example, are currently pushing the 'Covid-friendly' version of their successful Canadian format *Chef in Your Ear*, which resumed production in Italy this month.

Known locally as *Senti Chi Mangia* (ZeroStories for La7), the format is a competition between two professional chefs who must "compete without cooking", by providing remote direction to an amateur cook. The 'remote' aspect of the show means it has been relatively straightforward to produce whilst observing the rules of social distancing, given that physical distancing with limited communication is the central format device, and there is no audience. In the adapted Italian version everyone on set wears masks and gloves, and only the amateur chefs take off their masks while being filmed. The professional chefs don't leave their booths.

Scroggie and the team have also devised a 'lockdown' version which is close to commission in Colombia, and which sees well-known chefs play from their well-equipped kitchens at home, instead of from inside sealed booths in studio. The novices also play from their own home kitchens instead from separate studio kitchens, giving us an insight into their family life - and cupboards.



The host introduces and commentates from his or her home, and the usual studio 'reveal' of ingredients in a large cloche is replaced by a reveal of ingredients as each Novice simultaneously opens a sealed box of unlabelled ingredients delivered to their home. The final tasting by the Judges can be dropped, or replaced by a tasting and score out of 10 by the family of each Novice family, guided by the Chefs.

It's also worth noting that the budget for the edit of the lockdown version is the same as the studio version and can be done by the same remote editing shooting and editing software packages that many reality shows are currently using, such as LiveU.

b) REFLECT THE MOOD

What seems most apparent is just how much escapist, warm entertainment content is going to be needed, and will be the focus of the next wave of commissioning. As **David Flynn** at youngest Media says, "[The Brexit situation had already pushed the trend for feelgood stuff to the fore – and this has just made that even more the case. We were already looking to nostalgia and escapism, 'warm bath' entertainment shows. This period has reminded us of the value of that kind of TV – where entertainment was becoming the less prestigious sibling to drama, now those entertainment experiences that can bring the nation together are key again.](#)"

["And this will be worldwide. It's rare that something impacts the formats market globally – usually there are territory variations – but this time it's true for almost everywhere."](#)

As **Vasha Wallace**, EVP of Global Acquisitions and Development at Fremantle says, "[The repercussions of this year will be felt for a long time. After the recession of 2008-9 people wanted feel-good, and we saw peaks in sales for shows like Family Feud; Hole in the Wall went to 45 territories – silly, fun ideas.](#)"

The other thing she points out is how egalitarian gameshows can be. "[The great thing about them is that mostly they are celebrating real people's skills and achievements. It's not even necessarily about huge prizes – it can be about rewarding them with specific things they want or need, as in the tailored prizes in the new version of *Press Your Luck*.](#)"

Indeed ABC's reboot of the classic Fremantle game has each contestant personally pre-select a prize that's added to the game board – maybe a Winnebago to transport the family on a road trip, or a diamond ring for an upcoming proposal. It's

another neat trick to help us get to know and root for those ‘ordinary heroes’ trying to win big for themselves and their families.

c) Start by future-proofing the familiar

This brings us on to the most obvious strategy right now – that of rushing to shore up and ‘Covid-proof’ the familiar favourites that audiences will turn to first in stressful times.

As **Vasha Wallace** says, “We’ve been seeing even more interest than ever in our back catalogue of gameshows, especially those formats that can work without an audience, are maybe stripped, at a good price point, and can be shot in a safe way. Broadcasters are keen to have those tried and tested brands that audiences know.”

Of course this was all already happening well before the current situation. ABC has their 'Summer Fun and Games' season coming up, featuring many of those revived favourites (*To Tell the Truth*, *Celebrity Family Feud*, *Press Your Luck* and *Match Game*) along with newer hit, the giant mini-golf game *Holey Moley*.

In France C8 has relaunched *A prendre ou à laisser* (adaptation of *Deal or No Deal*) - first aired in 2004 on TF1, and last on air on D8 in 2015.

Alongside these, the successful renewals of *Supermarket Sweep* – in both the US (ABC) and UK (ITV2), both of which look set to return, with shooting taking place in the regulated environment of a supermarket set, where social distancing can be practiced without too much difficulty (not to mention eerily reflecting some of our own socially distanced, lockdown-era trolley dashes).



Most of these classic game shows have been biding their time to return when they can be safely shot in their usual sets, rather than going for the ‘at home’ model. H2O Productions, makers of the new series of *Deal or No Deal* series in France waited to shoot live, in studio, with producers assuring the public that all necessary safety measures have been observed.

Says Wallace, “Some territories asked us to try a version of *Family Feud* with contestants playing remotely from home. We shot a pilot but decided it just worked better in studio. So we’ve worked out a way to do that safely, in a studio where we can have full control of the setting and the protocols, and of course with families who are already in contact with each other, so it will be coming back in that familiar form in several territories.”

Simon Ingram at Ionoco has also seen the focus as being primarily on how to make the familiar favourites work, but with increasing care in how that is done. “Execs have been mostly focusing on existing brands and how to mine those - either in isolation, at home, or without audiences. It’s difficult because broadcasters don’t want to do anything too new or risky, they’d prefer the familiar, but at the same time there is the problem that they risk damaging the brands if they put them out now, with all the constraints. A month ago people

were more gung-ho and prepared to give stuff a go, knowing the audience would forgive a lot, but now they are asking - should we? They're a lot more circumspect.'

That said, the LA-based arm of Ionoco has just powered the tech for an at home version of *Hollywood Game Night* for NBC. "That did work well, it's a party feel, and the talent were able to carry it. Like some of the talk shows, certain people can just get away with being funny at home and it's fine. But we've probably all seen game shows where - filmed in isolation, without the audience or flashing lights - it all just seems a bit dull or repetitive. Broadcasters and producers are now asking - 'hold on, what are we trying to achieve here?' We need to take care to protect the shows we love, so they can eventually come back as originally intended."

So many producers are going back to what they already have, and audiences already know, to see what old formats they have that can be lightly tweaked to suit the times. According to **Aurelian Lipiansky** at French production company Tooco, "This kind of situation is new and allows us to dive back into our catalogue, and we have indeed reworked formats that we had put aside and redesigned the mechanics according to current demands."

Glenn Hugill at *Possessed* sees this as the part of game show development (or development in general) that is often overlooked or under-appreciated. "There are two broad tenets of development, as I always say to my team. You can try to plough virgin territory and create something completely new - like Heston Blumenthal if it was food. But it also takes just as much creativity to create the perfect burger for the times. Trend setting and trend following both need imagination. Shows like *The Wall*, *Catchpoint*, *The Hit List* build on familiar foundations but with a big build, or atmosphere or clever mechanic to give that little twist."



This is even more the case now, where the trick will be how to tweak those shows to be make-able, and feel right for now, but without ruining them. "Audiences will forgive their favourite shows a lot right now. It's great to watch *The Chase* in Australia and see them trying it with avatars - it's like 'you tried that for us, good for you!' It's like a war spirit, people are grateful for the effort. And it works because you know what they should look like.

"Of course it's hard for well-established formats like *Strictly Come Dancing* [*Dancing With the Stars*], where the whole essence of the show is about holding someone tight; but whatever they come up with, audiences will probably appreciate that people worked hard to bring them SOMETHING."

This is why the focus, for a little while at least, will remain on re-tooling the classics. "It's much harder for new shows trying to launch now because there is no frame of reference. You don't know if that's how they're supposed to look. And it's especially hard for shows that aren't yet established but didn't bake Covid-friendly production in.

"It's like having your favourite pet stuffed - it's not the same but at least it's something. But no-one wants a stuffed dog they don't know!"

d) SCALE IT ALL DOWN A BIT

With game shows old and new, one of the first tasks in making them more ‘Covid-friendly’ may sadly be to scale them down a bit.

In recent years, game shows have grown in size and ambition - particularly those created for the US networks. Fuelled by the need to create marketing buzz, and huge leaps in set, lighting and technological capabilities, game shows with a device of scale have dominated – from *The Wall*, to *Mental Samurai* and *Spin the Wheel*.



But as **Simon Ingram** at Ionoco suggests “there may be a bit of a pause on those. The new ones we’re working on are smaller, cosier, warmer, rather than big and brash. A gameboard, a host, two contestants, a 400 sq ft studio rather than a 45000 sq ft stage.”

This is not just about the money. “For a while ‘big’ may feel wrong - was it entirely necessary, or safe, to build something so big, involving so many people? The smaller, cosier feel is easier to defend, and for traditional broadcasters preserving integrity and their core brands will be even more important than the financial considerations.”

Moe Kanzaki in Sales at Nippon TV in Japan agrees. “In our development we’re trying not to think about Covid too much, but we do need to consider how the shows can be made with fewer people, on a smaller scale, as our top priority is to keep everyone safe.



“We need to change the way we produce shows for the next few months, at least. It will be difficult to produce big scale physical shows which require hours of construction and large audiences in the way we used to do before COVID-19. We are focused on our creativity even more - new, innovative and fun ideas that can be produced at smaller scale.”

But luckily game shows come in all shapes and sizes, and there are plenty of ideas that can still flourish at this time – and at a budget that cash-strapped broadcasters will appreciate, even as they try not to fill their schedules with cheap-looking programming.

As **Aurelian Lipiansky** at Tooco in France says: “what is certain is that we have to think about new production methods, with a much smaller audience and smaller teams. But we very much believe that the genre of game show can be a good solution in the short term because even with a small audience, the game does not require a lot of people on a set unlike a big entertainment show.”

David Flynn at youngest Media thinks that there will be real rewards here, for producers who can “deliver jeopardy or gripping tension, but at a reasonable tariff. High volume quizzes that look higher concept than they are, and can still be prestigious but on a budget.”

As he points out, their latest show *Jon Snow's Very Hard Questions* was made on a More4 budget for a low tariff, but with clever use of the set and screens looked more expensive than it was. **“And when you’re forced not to have an audience you can record even more of them at once.”**

Game shows with a strong mechanic, but very little in the way of elaborate set dressing or huge numbers of participants will be the much-needed workhorses of the schedule in many territories. Shows perhaps like LineUp Industries *Switch* (first created for VRT in Belgium and on its 5th season there), which has now been adapted for German broadcaster WDR. The show features five contestants who compete against each other by attempting to solve word puzzles and trivia questions to win a cash prize.

The German version (*Quizz Dich Auf 1*) was filmed in the same Belgian studio as the original, as a 45-minute weekly show, and as **Julian Curtis** at Lineup Industries says **“Switch only requires a handful of participants and can easily be filmed without a live audience.”**



e) DO IT WITHOUT A STUDIO AUDIENCE

That brings us on to one of biggest considerations for entertainment shows right now. Which ones can easily be made without an audience, and which ones will suffer more without them – and may not be worth doing? Just as broadcasters and football leagues are trying to work out whether matches with no fans and no atmosphere are really an appealing viewing proposition, so too are channels and producers wrestling with this question in TV entertainment. Says **Aurelian Lipiansky** at Tooco, **“Games are our priority, but we are also working on other genres and we are currently presenting our formats with concrete solutions to overcome a lack of audiences. Again, we consider it easier to produce Who Wants to be a Millionaire? than The Voice now.”**

Glenn Hugill at Possessed agrees **“Quizzes ARE more deliverable right now than many other things. They can take place without an audience. They’ve done amazing things with Have I Got News for You but it’s still lacking something without an audience. And if they fake it it would show. But many quizzes fake that anyway and you don’t really notice. It’s one of the genres you can get closest to ‘full fat’ right now, and for a reasonable price.”**

But it won’t work for every type of gameshow. As **Simon Ingram** at Ionoco says: **“people are now looking at what are the right game shows to make in this time. They’re saying ‘we’ll just make it without an audience’ but that won’t work for every show. A show like Mental Samurai probably doesn’t need an audience, it can carry itself. But there’s a kids game show we do that went into hiatus in March, and when they said they would bring it back without an audience, I thought it just wouldn’t be the same - it needs screaming kids!”**

At ITV in the UK, Controller of Entertainment **Katie Rawcliffe** is taking careful note of how other territories are approaching the tricky question of what can be done without audiences – using the time while pre-recorded series like *Britain's Got Talent* and *Beat the Chasers* are on air to watch and learn, as she decides what to do with other big entertainment brands to come, like *The Masked Singer*.



In South Korea, one show - *Comedy Big League* - used the contestants to fill the empty gaps left by the studio audience and provide reaction shots. In France the unlikely solution used by *N'oubliez pas les paroles!* (the adaptation of *Don't Forget the Lyrics!*, airing from 11 May) was to use a cast of puppets in place of an audience. This may not work very widely, but given the crazy vibe of *The Masked Singer*, nothing can be ruled out.... (The German Bundesliga clubs providing cardboard cut-outs of its fans to fill the stands might provide some further inspiration!)

Bandicoot in the UK is currently casting for a second series of *The Masked Singer*, and indications are that this is likely to go ahead with or without an audience. As Rawcliffe says **“It helps that the show is pre-recorded, so it is more manageable to shoot safely in an enclosed, guarded space.”**

Sometimes audiences are more integral to the show than just as atmosphere. One of the shows where this is the case is of course ***Who Wants to be a Millionaire?***, and channels where the show has returned will be looking to territories like France – one of the first to try it without audience, as ‘at home’ celebrity specials.



In their lockdown version, host Camille Combal linked to the stars playing the game from their homes. The ‘Ask the Audience’ lifeline was replaced with an ‘Ask a Home’ one, where the show randomly selected a fan of the show to be the lifeline, connecting to their home to ask the question. The ‘Phone a Friend’ lifeline is done as a Skype, connected through the show’s gameplay software.

As France was still in a high state of lockdown during the recording, no crews went to celebrity’s homes, with just a small kit of hardware sent to the home in advance, and a tech-test taking place before the recording start. The shows are recorded rather than live, so any technical problems could be fixed, and then the show continued as in a normal tv studio production.

As **Simon Ingram** has already pointed out, ensuring fair gameplay is much harder with gameshows set in the home – something that can be mitigated with a celebrity version, where stars are playing for charity and have their integrity and reputations to consider – but has been more or less ruled out for an ordinary edition of the show. For this reason civilian editions of *Millionaire*, post-lockdown, would only return in studio, without audience, but perhaps still using the ‘Ask a Home’ fan lifeline instead of ‘Ask the Audience.’

Using the home audience as a substitute for the studio one is being explored in other formats too. Says **Vasha Wallace** at Fremantle “We’re seeing real creativity in the way in which producers are thinking round the challenges of production in this crisis. In the German gameshow *Who Knew?* the audience sits behind the team captain and celebrity guest they want to back. If they back the winning team they each get a share of the prize pot – a mechanic that has proved really popular. Now they’re doing that same show with two LED screens of people playing from home behind them instead, and it works really well.”

But more tricks will need to be employed to mask that absence of the studio crowd – as in football, where TV audiences in Germany are now being offered the option to overlay simulated fan ‘atmos’. **David Flynn** at youngest Media thinks that ‘lack of audience will be a real problem for atmosphere. Sound design that can create some kind of bed will be key. We’ll also be looking at other ways of bringing people together. For example if a 50 person, ‘Covid-friendly’ audience becomes a possibility, there will be ways to boost that and make it feel bigger.”

f) USE GREEN SCREEN OR CGI EFFECTIVELY

One way to make limited studio sets feel bigger and more impressive, or even to ‘boost’ small audiences, is via the use of green screen or ‘mixed reality’ technology to drive gameplay with minimum physical builds.

David Flynn suggests that “It’s so important right now to concentrate the money on look and feel. Green screen is an interesting area to look at – there are challenges with how many people it requires on set, but we used it in our most recent pilot and it was a very good experience. We were using it to create a real feel – obviously you could take it further into different settings, and it would be interesting to see how far that could go, but I would still be careful to create a sense of the real as generally that’s what audiences prefer.”

Ionoco has been getting lots of calls about how their technology could create solutions here. “We’ve been talking about lots of virtual sets. Less green screen but more mixed reality. For a while there will definitely be less building of giant stages for gameshows – so something like *Mental Samurai* might require a rethink. But there’s lots you can do, building a small section of a set and then enhancing it to make it seem bigger, allowing different camera shots, even if lots of it is video content delivery.

“For virtually every genre we’ll see a leap in that direction. But it’s not simple - you need tracking cameras, a great set designer, quality delivery to look good.

Vasha Wallace agrees that “There will also be opportunities for other ideas that use VR or other CGI technology right now. The technology has moved on so much in the last few years, and we’re already talking to a number of territories about ideas like this.”

One of the most intriguing and ambitious ideas currently under discussion in the US uses some of the ‘interactive mixed reality’ technology employed in Fremantle’s flawed but intriguing *Lost in Time* series, created by special effects and gaming



specialists The Future Group. In *Lost in Time*, three contestants found themselves ‘transported’ to different historical eras and locations - from the Wild West to the Ice Age, Medieval and Jurassic periods - to compete in challenges.

This time The Future Group has lent their CGI creativity to Shumsky Production’s ***The Big Little Gameshow*** (Lionsgate), which immerses contestants in a computer-generated game show world, where they are seemingly ‘shrunk’ to a 50th of their size and must complete scaled-up challenges such as lacing a giant shoe, constructing a sandwich from enormous ingredients, or typing on a huge keyboard.

While some of the challenges must be built, or part-built as props, the beauty of the idea is that much of the world around them can be created by the same real-time special effects and gaming technology as in *Lost In Time*. To date there has been some resistance to TV game shows going down the gaming route - with the argument that one is a passive and one an active experience - but perhaps there might now be more interest in exploring technology which can create big, impressive, entertainment ‘experiences’, even under strict filming constraints. It’s not the cheap option, but is one extra approach to consider right now.

g) TAKE THE CHANCE TO EXPERIMENT WITH REMOTE PLAYALONG... BUT DON’T RUSH THE TECHNOLOGY

Another unforeseen benefit to this period of Quarantine TV may be the opportunity for producers and broadcasters to experiment more fully with play-along, interactive formats, in various genres. With audiences captive in their homes and desperately looking to engage with others and feel part of some communal experiences again (from sing-alongs, to family or office Zoom quizzes to online exercise sessions), there has never been a better time to test formats with genuine audience engagement - whether it’s via second screen apps or just old-fashioned, real-time ‘joining in’.

In quiz and game this is happening right across the board - for all demographics, and with both new and established brands.

With existing shows like *The Chase*, one simple evolution has been to have contestants now playing to try and beat The Chaser, but from the comfort of their own homes, as they did in Israel with *Ha’Mirdaf Ad Ha’Bayit (The Chase at Home)* on Kan 11.

In Belgium Eén initially broadcast three weeks’ worth of quiz show *Blokken (Blockx)* with all the candidates taking part from their homes, and host Ben Crabbé linking from studio with a very limited crew. As of May, the series has been welcoming contestants back into the studio, with social distancing enforced between host and players and no live studio audience for the rest of the season.



France 3's *Jouons à la maison* (Tr. *Let's Play at Home*) similarly saw presenter Alex Goude linking to four self-isolating contestants participating via video conference and answering quick-fire questions to win a prize of €4,000. Episodes air at 20.30 on Saturdays and Sundays.

Aurelian Lipiansky says "France Televisions places a lot of emphasis on 3D sets with a green background and have had good results on the programs they produce. I think this is a very good thing because they were reactive and were able to adapt very quickly to the circumstances. I don't think that the ratings would have been as good under normal circumstances, but it's a great initiative to have made so many programs in such a short time. For example, France 3 launched a game in "lockdown" mode, the adaptation of **Let's Ask America**, which used screens and at-home interaction very effectively."

While these individual home-player shots will probably never be a totally satisfactory substitute for a game played collectively in studio, audiences have become used to seeing them - perhaps paving the way for more 'home viewer' play-along strands in other shows.

At interactive TV entertainment tech specialists Monterosa, Director of Global Entertainment **Peter Cassidy** says that while lots of the biggest vote shows they power are on hold or up in the air - *Britain's Got Talent*, *Love Island*, the *MTV* and *Kids Choice Awards* - they have been really busy with a whole new raft of conversations about ways to engage audiences with live play-along. "It's about two things - the need to create new live content, and ways to re-energise 'remote' talent; and meeting the desire that people have to feel connected right now."



"This could be by connecting presenters in studios with viewers at home. Or it could be by repurposing archive – perhaps by turning sports footage into a play-along quiz. There's a lot of discussions going on. It feels like there are going to be one or two game changing formats that are going to come out of this period. But as ever, it's still about keeping the entertainment value for those not participating, so these celebrity-led TV games, where viewers can play along at home or not, still work best."

One example is in Israel, where Tedy Productions have rebooted their primetime musical format *All Together Now* - (not to be confused with the Endemol Shine format of the same name), and now retitled as **Can't Stop the Music** on Keshet 12. The show first aired in Israel in 2005 and has been adapted to meet current social distancing guidelines, with the two celebrity teams competing in-studio to solve a series of musical challenges and puzzles, while viewers are invited to join in from home via video. With no studio audiences currently allowed, the sense that someone is watching and joining in, or appreciating the stars' efforts, must come from at-home viewer participation.

With much of linear TV now looking more like YouTube or online content (self-shot, at home, pretty basic), lines are becoming increasingly blurred, allowing broadcasters to more easily trial something first online and then quickly move it to

their linear channel - these days with very little extra dressing up - if there is proven audience appetite.

In Spain, at the start of May, Mediaset launched quiz format **Qarenta** (a play on the Spanish words for quarantine and forty) via Telecinco's website, which due to its strong reception has now been given a Monday-Thursday primetime slot on Mediaset's linear channel BeMad. Each day sees four participants answer 40 questions - 10 each - via video call. The player who answers the most questions correctly returns the next day to face three new contestants. Christian Gálvez hosts, with famous faces also invited to take part.

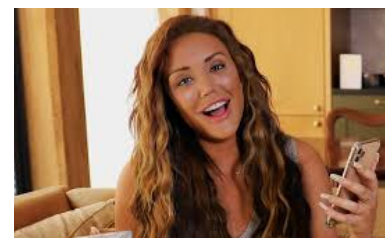


Whether the audience acceptance of this very basic, interactive, online-style content continues past the end of the current situation is doubtful, but for the moment they are prepared to overlook and forgive quite a lot for a bit of entertaining, engaging diversion.

As a recent piece in Broadcast about Channel 4's corona-impacted commissioning squeeze put it *"there is a sense that viewers may accept innovative but potentially less-polished programmed in the coming months."* This is giving producers a rare and brief opportunity to adopt the sort of 'just put it out there', bootstrap, experiment/ feedback loop process that the more agile digital platforms have long been able to employ - and get commissioners interested in the process, as they look around for shows to fill their linear schedules.

Says **Peter Cassidy** at Monterosa **"Broadcasters are not quite saying 'let's just put this mobile gameshow on TV', even now, but they are certainly looking at this kind of content with more interest. In the US the new revival of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? finished its TV airing with an HQ Trivia-style game, that then drove viewers to the app we built to continue playing. They were giving away \$125,000 online, so it still felt like big event stuff - kind of like an aftershow on the app, a way to segue between two platforms and experiences, and something we could start to see more of thanks to the current situation."**

MTV has taken the multi-platform route with their *MTV Games Live with Charlotte Crosby*, a fast-turnaround live and interactive game show that exists as weekly Thursday night episodes on the linear channel (at 20:30 GMT+1) and goes out on *Geordie Shore's* Facebook and YouTube channels. Hosted by the *Geordie Shore* star, who films herself live from her mum and dad's house, the 6x30' series consists of various play-along quizzes and challenges, with celebrity guests joining Crosby to compete via video link.



The series is being remotely produced by ViacomCBS Digital Studios International using cloud-based platform Grabyo and Zoom. Crosby films each episode from her home, using Zoom to connect the host and guests, with a director remotely mixing between the celebrity guests and viewers at home.

Talking to IBC365 magazine, Craig Orr, VP commissioning and development at MTV International, explained that Crosby is very much the linchpin of the production, using wireless in-ear headphones with a separate feed into each ear, helping her navigate between the guests and the director and producer. In keeping with the agility of making a production in this way, Crosby's mum is the conduit for viewer reactions, comments and questions, which are texted to her by the production team's remote-working moderators. Crosby also uses her own social channels to reach her audience, having live link ups with celebrity guests and fans playing at home.

In Denmark, TV2 has been using popular comedians Mark and Melvin to host a live, play- along bingo show *Banko med Mark og Melvin* (Tr. *Bingo with Mark and Melvin*), all produced under the current restrictions. The show is a continuation of former TV 2 successes *Bingo Banko* and *Zulu Bingo*, in which viewers print their own bingo cards and the numbers are drawn in unusual ways. In this lockdown version of the show, the bingo numbers are drawn based on outcomes of different duel battles between celebrities participating from their homes via video calls - the puzzles they solve then reveal numbers. For those playing along at home, if they win a line they can appear live on the show to win a hamper of goods. The show got off to a great start with a 47.7% share in its Saturday night slot.

At the end of March, comic and TV host Jimmy Carr released short-form series ***The Little Tiny Quiz Of The Lockdown*** on his YouTube channel – its title a fun poke at *The Big Fat Quiz of the Year*, the TV show Carr hosts annually. The comedian presents viewers with a range of questions at 6pm GMT+1, before releasing a follow-up video at 8pm in which he shares the answers. The first five questions are general knowledge and the second five are more 'fun things'.



With a very basic green screen background and graphics, and not much preamble, it's pub quiz fun at its most basic, but there's something quite reassuring and enjoyable about how the playing of the quiz and then the revealing of the answers a bit later mirrors the genuine pub quiz experience many of us are missing in the UK.

While we've had waves of these types of interactive game show over the years, from the late-night Quiz TV iterations in the UK in the early 2000's, to the success of Facebook's *HQ Trivia* and *Confetti* more recently, this is perhaps the first time that their low-budget, mass experience, cheery vibe has chimed so neatly with the prevailing style of TV entertainment.

But there will be a short window of time where audiences are willing to accept this 'cheap and cheerful' approach, before they start to want interactive games that look a little slicker. Here is where green screen and CGI will move in to help, with game technology providers doing their best to ramp up the visual effects.

Armoza Formats' latest interactive game show ***Beat The Grid*** is being marketed as 'designed to be



produced during the Covid-19 lockdown'. Created in partnership with Israeli firm Gamechanger, it requires only a small crew and set, which is then transformed into a big shiny floor format using CGI-technology.

The format requires contestants to find the answers to a question on a giant grid, which gradually enlarges. Viewers can also start playing, with cash prizes available for those with the most correct answers.

Nimrod Harel, co-founder & CEO of Gamechanger, says: “We have seen a shift in the TV industry: budgets are getting smaller but the need for an expensive look is in higher demand so we have developed a technology that overcomes this.”

As **Simon Ingram** at Ionoco says “We’re getting asked a lot more about play-Nimrod Havel along formats, but again, it’s not always about doing a new show. There have been so many technological advancements of late that there are lots of things we can apply to older brands. On *Hollywood Game Night* we had actual buzzers that worked, even remotely.”



The important thing – particularly with valuable brands – is not to do it in haste, even in a crisis like this. “There are lots of ‘could we...?’ conversations going on” says Ingram “but these technological solutions are expensive and complicated and not things you want to rush. You CAN build a game in which the whole home audience can take part, but it’s difficult and you don’t want to do it in haste and have it all fall down!”

h) BE INSPIRED BY THE CONSTRAINTS

Lastly, what many producers have stressed, is how a moment of crisis or constraint like this can lead to real innovation in many areas – from new ideas themselves, to the ways in which shows are made. That’s exceptionally true for game shows, where ‘rules’ and the ways they can be broken or reconfigured, are essential to the process of development.

What is also exciting is the fact that, for a time, game shows may need to step in to fill audience needs, where other genres can’t. Says **Glenn Hugill** at Possessed “What we’re finding creatively energising right now, is thinking about how to make quiz and game deliver something of what audiences would be expecting from the dramas they’ll be missing. What would the M. Night Shyamalan game show be? Thinking high concept like that, about how games could fill those needs, is inspiring.”

This is also a rare moment when most of the world is experiencing a similar situation – a novel experience for development teams, who can find it hard to develop ideas with universal appeal, when there is often so much territory variation.

“It’s fun to think of the universal things!” says Hugill. “I love that TikTok is huge everywhere, and The Masked Singer. It’s exciting to know that you CAN still capture the imagination of the world en masse with something. We should be shooting for that – it’s definitely our model – and co-developing between

broadcasters with shared DNA, or piloting between the UK and US even more right now.”

But now is not the time for TV creatives to shout about the innovative ideas or production solutions they come up with, to deliver safe entertainment.

“There will be practical things we need to do – with clever technology, for example; or people not standing next to each other, or people all from the same household playing – but those things need to be baked into the idea, and almost unnoticeable, so people can relax and stop worrying about it. And so it doesn’t seem like a ‘lockdown idea’ but is just insured against future risk,” Hugill cautions.

“Entertainment depends on suspension of disbelief. There is normally a conceit that you are asking the audience to buy into. The problem now is that everybody is anxiously peering behind the Wizard of Oz’s curtain, they’re getting distracted by the door behind the curtain and they’re worrying about how big it is and whether two people can safely get through it together.”

For creatives who are used to doing their blue-sky thinking WAY before getting production managers, HR, cost managers and Health and Safety involved, this is going to be quite a shift in process. For a while it might be the execution driving ideas rather than the other way round. But that may also lead to some really interesting new concepts, and clever ways of making them.

Says Hugill: “Audiences will still want the gloss, and production companies need to be able to deliver shows that look like they were made in the old world, but are actually made in the new world. Looking extraordinary but still cost-effective. And yes – it probably is a good idea to now start having production managers in the development process earlier. It’s not about the frills they’ll want to cut out anymore, it’s about life and death!”

2. The Key Gameshows Trends - and How Covid-19 Will or Won’t Affect Them

While the effects of Covid-19 may eventually produce some radical new ideas and innovations in game shows, it will also cause shifts and adaptations to the existing formats and trends we have been tracking over the last 12 months.

In this section we outline those trends, and how they might be impacted.

a) MUSICAL GUESSING GAMES

The most prominent and talked about trend in game shows in the last 12-18 months has been the musical game show, or the ‘talent show with guessing’ – with *The Masked Singer* the most high



profile example. As **Glenn Hugill** has already pointed out “**Everything is now play-along - the most successful dramas are police cases you can guess along with, music talent shows are now guessing games – it’s all about the kudos of solving it first.**”

Across the world, territories are at different stages of production and decision-making around how to safely produce universal hit **The Masked Singer**. In the UK, an autumn run gives ITV a little more time to decide. In France, shooting on a second series will begin in July. With an audience of 6.603 million (32.5% share) in the prime time Friday slot from November 2019, TF1 will be doing everything they can to make sure it can successfully return – planning, at this point, to film it with a live studio audience.

Even before the success of *The Masked Singer* (first launched in 2015), JTBC’s **Hidden Singer** (2013) was trialling the musical guessing game. In this format a famous singer goes up against several impersonators of the singer. Each person sings one measure of a song behind a screen, for four rounds. In the first three rounds, an audience of 100 people vote on the person who they think is not the real singer and the person with the most votes is eliminated. In the final round, the audience votes on who they think is the real singer and the person with the most votes wins the episode.

At one point NBC picked up the US rights to the show, but it never made it to air. Other territories to have tried it include China, Italy, Thailand, Vietnam and Spain.

The next Korean format to come down the track for US viewers – current production issues notwithstanding - could well be CJ ENM’s **I Can See Your Voice**, on air on tvN since 2015, but only now gaining widespread attention since Fox picked it up as one of three shows to pilot in 2019 (along with *Game of Talents* and *Million Dollar Singer*).



Endemol Shine had the ex-Asia distribution licence originally, but it sat in their catalogue for a few years without much attention, before reverting back to CJ ENM and then ultimately being picked up by Fox post-*Masked Singer*. To date there have been 11 sales of the format, with versions currently on air in Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, and set to air in the US and Romania, with other European territories reportedly set to follow. With Fox borrowing some of the elements from the Thai version of *The Masked Singer* for its successful adaptation of that format, it will be interesting to see further tweaks from other producing territories.

The show’s basic format has guest artists attempting to guess a trained singer and one who is completely tone-deaf from a line-up. The contestants are gradually eliminated without ever performing, until in the final round, the last contestant standing performs with the pop star. If they can hold a tune, they are rewarded; if they cannot, they receive a cash prize. Fox announced their series order in January 2020, but, as with everything right now, it will depend on how these bigger productions can be safely delivered.

Riding high on the success of this show, plus *Hidden Singer* and *The Masked Singer*, Korean producers are not ready to give up on the surprise performance reveal genre just yet. **Super Hearer** (CJ ENM, June 2019) has a panel of five celebrity ‘Super Hearers’ who attempt to identify specific types of contestants by listening to them sing. The theme – for example gender, age or nationality – changes with each episode. Attempting to disrupt the Super Hearers are an opposing panel of five celebrity ‘Villains’. Assisted by the Villains’ misguidance, the hidden contestants compete with the Super Hearers for a cash prize, which they claim if they manage to successfully deceive them

Despite all the constraints of the current corona situation, the market should probably brace itself for many other guessing/reveal talent formats, given the tendency for buyers to rush towards mini-trends like this. If smaller, spaced audiences can eventually be permitted, and performers safely managed and pre-recorded, shows reliant on individual performances like these, and *The Masked Dancer* (also Fox), may be able to continue.

Trickier might be the talent game shows which rely on bigger variety performances, involving lots of members, like Media Ranch’s format **Watch!** - snapped up by ten territories before even airing at the end of 2019.



In this game/talent hybrid, two teams of four are positioned on stage to witness an expansive variety show. They then need to use their memory skills to remember specific details about the acts they just watched, as the more they remember, the more they can win. An accompanying app can allow viewers to play along, testing their own memory.

Created by producers John Kirhoffer and Dan Munday (who are billed as having worked with Mark Burnett on *Survivor*), the combination of talent show spectacle and ‘play from your sofa’ memory game clearly proved appealing enough for a number of deals to be quickly signed: Bunim/Murray Productions for the U.S., RDF/Fizz for the UK; Warner for Denmark; ITV for Sweden; Endemol Shine for Italy, Spain and Portugal, along with Talpa Germany, WeMake in France and Matchbox Pictures in Australia.

It was an extraordinarily fast set of options for an as-yet untested format, suggesting that the heat around uncovering ‘the next *Masked Singer*’ has led many to fear missing out. Whether the talent/game hybrid will provide the next global hit, and whether it is one of the more make-able types of show at this time remains to be seen. The format will need hefty doses of either comedy or emotion along with its play-along if it is to match either *Masked Singer* or its talent show predecessors.

If the live performance versions of these musical guessing games will be more difficult to produce right now, there will certainly be a space opening up for the archive and nostalgia-based alternatives. From *Name That Tune*-style shows like **The Hit List** (due to return to BBC1 later in 2020) to generational



pop culture contests like STS (Russia)'s **Detki-predki** (*Tr. Kids and Parents*, April 2020), expect to see clip-based music games temporarily divert us from the more complex staged productions currently on hold.

b) **STANDING IN FOR SPORTS: FUNNY, PHYSICAL & SUPERSIZED KIDS GAMES**

As Fremantle's **Vasha Wallace** has already pointed out, what the world will need in the next year is silly, fun entertainment. Funny, physical, or supersized games that have recently been popular will certainly fit that brief – although the challenges of visual scale and large numbers of contestants and production crew will make some trickier than others.

There is also an interesting question yet to be resolved around the safety benefits of doing these types of big physical contest outside versus inside. In general, the virus is thought to transmit less easily outside, perhaps pointing to a wave of shows set in wide open spaces. In Sweden, for example, SVT has just ordered an 8 x 60' local version of Irish format **Fittest Family**, with seven families competing to be crowned 'Sweden's Strongest Family' .



The format has been adapted to meet strict safety protocols 'recorded on a redesigned set and feature social distancing-friendly tasks.' Obviously formats like this that involve competing families have an advantage in keeping household 'bubbles' together. But one of the key headlines in the announcement of the commission is the note that the action takes place outdoors in a mountain environment – a more remote setting that may give reassurance to channels looking to commission reality games or contests like this.

On the other hand, many broadcasters and producers are turning to the safety and more controllable environment of a studio for their games, versus the myriad, riskier elements of a real-world setting. As we've already heard, safety concerns may – for a time – constrain thinking when it comes to developing big, new physical game concepts. But for the tried and tested familiar favourites, broadcasters and producers are willing to put in a lot of work to mitigate the risks.

One such old favourite is the physical game **Wipeout**. Having originally run on ABC from 2008 -2014 (and sold to more than 30 territories), the show was hugely successful in combining Japanese elements of humiliating physical obstacle course, with outdoor family fun and wry, sports-style commentary. Many 'son-of-*Wipeout*' formats followed, but now the original is coming back, on TBS, as a twenty episode reboot for later this year.



New format twists see each game designed over three rounds to further challenge and wear out contestants' stamina, but key elements like the iconic big

red balls will return. So far, producers Endemol Shine North America have said only that casting will take place virtually, but production plans that meet new safety protocols are ‘still being finalised.’

A show with so much physical contact and activity, on a set of scale, will be challenging, but the predicted demand for this type of entertainment will mean that the rewards should be worth the complications. **There’s no doubt that co-viewing for families locked down at home together, and physical game shows to make up for the lack of live sports, have been two big trends to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis.** Expect to see more shows like this (and perhaps more revivals of this one elsewhere) – if the brand leader can get the production methods right. For those still wary, one alternative approach is just to do a celebratory retrospective of the show for now - as BBC1 are doing with a six part series of **Total Wipeout: Freddie and Paddy Takeover**, in which *Top Gear* hosts Freddie Flintoff and Paddy McGuinness will commentate over old episodes of the I competition.

With sports still out of the schedules in many territories, the Olympics cancelled, and sportsmen and women with empty diaries (but a need to stay competitive) there may also be a rush towards the more ‘sports-like’ physical games.

ABC’s latest *Wipeout*-style hit has been supersized mini-golf show **Holey Moley** - a recent winner at the Realscreen Awards and Rose d’Or nominee. In the US series two, *Holey Moley II: The Sequel*, kicked off this month (21 May 2020) with another twelve contestants going head-to-head in three rounds of golf, and the final challenge of ‘Mt. Holey Moley’.

Now Sat 1 in Germany is developing a local version, titled **Oh my Golf! Die Mega Minigolf Show**. The idea of a miniature golf show is not entirely new in Germany: in 2006 and 2007, Hella von Sinnen and Hugo Egon Balder presented a celebrity miniature golf tournament under the title **Jetzt wird eingelocht** (*Now it will be punched in*), which was extremely successful with market shares of more than 15 percent.

But Sat 1 will be hoping for success with the longer running US format, versus local event version. Production is due to take place this spring/summer on the US set, piggybacking on the next ABC series. Shows which can lend out their sets or ‘hubs’ like this – with all necessary safety protocols in place – will have some benefits to offer, when travel restrictions permit them to ship in their contestants.

Meanwhile Fox is also touting its own supersized playground game, **Ultimate Tag**, as another ‘sports-replacement’ piece of entertainment programming, and another on-screen portrayal of the childhood game, following German broadcaster Sat.1’s *Catch!* (Dec 2018).



Launched on 20 May 2020, after *The Masked Singer* finale, the show has contestants vault, dodge, tumble and dive over various epic, three-dimensional moving courses, with one simple goal: “Don’t get caught” as professional taggers chase after them. In classic *Gladiators* (and now *Masked*

Singer) style, the athlete taggers all have character names – Atomic Ant, Viking, Horse, Bulldog – that are perfect for attracting the family audience this show is clearly aimed at.

It's a somewhat ironic show to be launching in the midst of social distancing, a fact that Fox and the show's hosts, NFL stars and brothers JJ, Derek and TJ Watt are rather playing down. *"Somebody did bring that up to me the other day"* said JJ recently. *"One of my friends said, "Don't you think it's kind of ironic that you're coming out with a game show called Ultimate Tag during the time when everybody is trying to not get tagged by other people in real life?" And it really was kind of a funny little irony there obviously we wish we weren't in the situation that we're in and we wish we didn't have to do something like that in the real world. But I do think that this game will give people a bit of a reprieve from the real world and hopefully give them a chance to kind of sink into this Ultimate Tag world for an hour and enjoy it and just watch with some childhood glee again."*

That said, Rob Wade, president, alternative entertainment and specials at Fox Entertainment, is also keen to tie the show in to his recent acquisition of WWE: *"I certainly feel that this show fits more closely with the WWE audience...It's a real opportunity for families to sit around the TV and watch that."*

WWE's flagship program, *WWE'S Smackdown Live* is due to make its debut on Fox this coming October, so clearly, for the moment, US networks and sports promoters are hoping that both wrestling, and chasing and tackling people in TV game shows will continue to be safe activities.

But as talk show host John Oliver examined in an episode of his ***Last Week Tonight*** show this month, the differing state attitudes to opening up post-coronavirus lockdown have made for a confusing picture when it comes to what sporting events will or won't be on this year.



Florida has ruled WWE an 'essential service' (on an equal footing with hospitals and law enforcement), allowing events to now go ahead; while the organisers of UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) are creating a quarantine 'Fight Island' (now there's a game show title...) so that their fights can continue safely, also in Florida. So perhaps there won't be as much of a TV sports drought in the US as in some other countries?

John Oliver was unsure of the wisdom of these decisions, choosing instead to have his show sponsor Jelle's Marble Runs – the YouTube channel that has been attracting huge attention for its gripping marble racing events.

Feeding into the other coronavirus-inspired, social media trend of comedians and commentators voicing ever more ridiculous sports-substitutes (from squirrels in the park to prams racing to cross the road), THIS is the kind of safe, contestant-free, TV sports/ gameshow some of us may end up watching, if things don't go to plan.

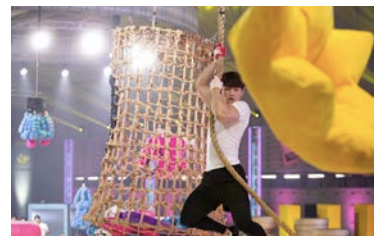
In those territories with a continuing real sports void, there is also the option of a move towards the sillier, smaller sporting gameshows like Comedy Central's ***Gods of the Game*** (March 2020, UK).

From Mad Monk (makers of the similarly surreal *Wild Things* and *Banzai*), this has contestants taking on celebrated Olympians in wacky park sports, with a head start to give them a chance. A good array of British sporting heroes included Bradley Wiggins presiding (in huge breastplate) from an arena throne, cycling superstar Chris Hoy in a pedalo, Olympic gymnast Max Whitlock on some monkey bars and gold medal-winning hockey player Sam Quek tenpin bowling.

The games are fun and daft (although all make sense), but the whole thing seems a little under-powered – perhaps the result of a clearly tight budget, that doesn't allow for the more elaborate, visual flights of fancy *Wild Things* benefited from. Ratings were below slot average, but that's not to say this show won't attract its own cult following, as Mad Monk's productions tend to do, or couldn't be scaled up elsewhere to fill this particular need.

Japan and South Korea have long been the source and inspiration for these types of extreme, lunatic physical gameshows, and plenty of new Asian examples are coming down the track. Given Asian countries' firmer grip on Covid-prevention measures at this point, it may be to these territories that buyers also need to look for the next, carefully produced versions of them.

In South Korea TVN has just launched **Cash Back** – a new game show format co-produced by Asian media giant CJ ENM and Banijay-owned US prodco Bunim/Murray Productions. In the two pilot episodes, 18 top athletes, including Olympic gold medallists and national champions are pitted against “crazy obstacles” to bank as much money as they can – but the money comes in the form of tough-to-move objects of all shapes and sizes ('moneymojs'), adding to the difficulty.



Although Bunim/Murray were in the end unable to attend the production, due to travel restrictions, the idea was developed in partnership, and the pilot recordings went ahead this spring - albeit without audience. Luckily the show doesn't appear to have suffered, with plenty of manic energy and a pumped up sound bed to distract from any lack of studio atmosphere. An impressive set and clear premise make for a visually appealing contest, and ratings were solid for a new show on a pay-tv channel.

After the last economic shock – the crash of 2008-9 – Fremantle's **Vasha Wallace** reminds us that it was *Hole in the Wall* that we were all going wild for: the ultimate 'crazy Japanese gameshow' that sold to 45 territories. Nippon TV will be hoping that their new **Block Out** format – a co-production with Red Arrow – might repeat history, with its similarly colourful, comical gameplay.

In *Block Out* two teams of four are challenged with different physical and mental tasks, while standing with their backs to a wall of blocks. Following every wrong answer or bad judgement, the blocks are pushed out in a variety of combinations and speeds, forcing contestants into crazy positions to avoid



being knocked into the pit below.

It's a fun premise, with more variety to its challenges than *Hole in the Wall*, but a similar look and feel – a great example of co-development between East and West that has already been picked up RTVE in Spain for La1 channel (to be produced by Endemol Shine Iberia-owned Gestmusic) and by AVROTROS for the Netherlands, (to be produced by Tin Can).

These East / West development collaborations are really starting to bear fruit in the game show space, as international production groups increasingly look East to harness the (largely comedic) sensibilities of the Asian market and translate them for global audiences.

Another recent example is Asahi Television (ABC)'s partnership with NBCUniversal, which has resulted in workplace contest ***The Secret Gameshow*** (March 2020).

Here unsuspecting employees are nominated by a colleague or their boss and tasked to perform a series of challenges to win a cash prize. However, they only win the money if no one in the office finds out what they are up to. Tasks get increasingly more difficult over three rounds, and range from photocopying different body parts to standing on the boss's desk.



While the idea of the hidden camera workplace challenge is not especially new, the tricky balance between location stunts and studio game is well-handled here, with the illusion created that the contestants are being “beamed” into the live studio audience as they try to secretly complete their office tasks. Different territories will handle that studio/ location split as they see fit, but with a good bible of potential challenges and a high energy, comedic tone, there is no reason why it shouldn't do well – once we all have offices to go back to.

Last, and perhaps most intriguing, is Nippon TV's ***Red Carpet Survival*** – launched at MIPCOM 2019, but now picked up by ITV Studios for 33 countries around the world. The agreement will see ITVS taking exclusive rights to produce the unscripted game show in each territory where it has an unscripted production base. The production deal spans territories across Europe, the US, the Middle East, North Africa and Australia, as well as rights to distribute the resulting finished versions worldwide.



Red Carpet Survival is described as “a high-energy game show” in which contestants act as bodyguards who must safely escort a celebrity VIP. Their mission is to make the VIP stay on the red carpet that stretches out to their destination no matter what - facing explosions, attacks by robots and even real crocodiles on their way. The format was created and produced by Nippon TV's production division, and aired as two 30 minute episodes and 60 minute episode in 2019.

As **Moe Kanzaki** in Sales at Nippon TV says “When we pitch our formats to buyers they usually say ‘have you got anything crazy?’ That is what Japan is known for. *Red Carpet Survival* is a great example – as ITV Studios mentioned to us, ‘everyone knows the red carpet, the bodyguard and the VIP - they are all universal but normally depicted in a particular way. Only the Japanese would think of putting such a comedic twist on them!’”

It’s that highly visual, cartoonish approach that works so well in attracting broad family audiences to these types of game. Kanzaki goes on to describe how “we love the mix of comedy and tension, explosions and celebrities. There is a comedy essence to most of our gameshows that is very important.

“We are especially keen to reach kids and teens and these shows work well for shared viewing. As in other territories ratings have been higher than usual in that age group during this pandemic period, and we are working hard to make sure our shows continue to appeal to them.”

Going back to the inside versus outside shooting debate, in the time of Covid-19, *Red Carpet Survival* does perhaps have one other thing going for it.

“Red Carpet Survival is shot inside and outside, on location. We used an airport for episode one - getting the celebrity to the limo from the airport; then a hotel - getting them from hotel room to limo; then a university - getting them from the car into a conference centre.”

Given that many of these locations are currently closed, fairly empty, or struggling for business, in multiple territories, perhaps this is an excellent way to be making use of them...

c) THE ‘HUMAN EXPERIMENT’ GAMES

Following the trend for reframing classic TV gameplay as ‘experiment’, has come a wave of game shows which set out to test human reactions in some way. As a sub-set of the comedic physical contests above, these types of challenge – usually where contestants must try NOT to do something – have exploded in the last couple of years.

The Japanese are active in this area too, with ***Mute It!*** the most recent example, also from Nippon TV. As the creators of the original, hugely influential iteration *Silent Library* (2001), Nippon has a great track record here, but there are also similar US and UK efforts already on the market, such as Netflix's *Flinch* (don't flinch while we do mad stuff to you, May 2019) and ABC's *Don't!* (don't blink, laugh, look back etc, June 2020).



Having rated very well in primetime in Japan, what this one has going for it is its simplicity – just one rule: don't make a sound over 50db – and the fact that that rule is easily measurable (a clear parameter which *Flinch* lacked). Layered over that central premise are some fun and imaginative obstacle courses in the ‘Hall of

Silence' that have you holding your breath throughout – more perfect co-viewing for families stuck inside on the sofa.

Moe Kanzaki at Nippon TV explains that there was a very clear shift in the development of the idea, to ensure that it did capture those younger viewers. “When we did the pilot of *Mute It!* last year it was more serious, with extreme concentration and silence. As we moved the program to a prime time slot, we made it more appealing to the family audience including kids and teens, changed the theme to a lighter, more uplifting tone and we achieved a higher rating amongst young audiences.” According to Nippon the format can run at anything from 30 to 120 minutes, although the shorter duration might suit its simple set-up best.

Having launched the format this spring, originally timed for MIP TV, Nippon is currently in conversations with various buyers. Says Kanzaki “Lots of decisions have been on hold since coronavirus. Despite the current situation, buyers are actively looking for new fun gameshows that can be produced after lockdown is lifted. The good thing about the *Mute It!* format is that it can be shot while keeping social distancing. This game is played by one contestant at a time in an empty silent studio without needing any audience, so it's much easier to produce with less people involved than many other game shows. We shot our most recent episode in March, so that shows it is possible, even in the current situation.”

Meanwhile ABC's 8 x 60' Adam Scott- hosted alternative ***Don't!*** will premiere Thursday 11 June, with families of four working together to perform five physical and mental challenges. Each task comes with one rule: “Don't” do something, e.g. ‘Don't blink,” “Don't Look Back” and “Don't Play Ball in the House.” Accomplished missions will earn money in team bank accounts, while failed challenges will force players to suffer silly consequences. Contestants can also test their fearlessness by selecting risky options like the “Don't Push” button or a “Don't You Dare, You” challenge. In the end, teams will keep the money remaining in their bank, if anything is left at all. Ryan Reynolds is Exec producing and voicing the show, being produced by Banijay Studios North America.



While it's advisable to keep the challenges in these types of show as varied and interesting as possible, sometimes it is possible to just stick to one, very funny brand of reaction, if you combine it with a quiz. A surprisingly entertaining, ridiculously effective entrant into this category is TruTV's recent ***Hot Ones: The Game Show*** (March 2020).

The premise is simply that contestants have to eat increasingly spicy chicken wings whilst answering increasingly difficult questions; an audience chanting "CLEAN THAT WING" at them throughout. Ridiculous - and TruTV's most successful launch in five years... A classic piece of schadenfreude television, watching contestants



suffer (sweats, puking, fidgeting, gagging), while trying to focus on the game, is hugely funny and enjoyable. Short, twenty minute episodes ensure the joke doesn't wear too thin, and the hyped up crowd, hot, jazzy set and casual host keep the whole thing perfectly pitched at its laddish male audience.

In the UK, the latest in this physical-reactions-meets-quiz space might be BBC Daytime's new commission **Lightning** (Banijay Group's Fizz and Northern Ireland-based Nice One TV) which sees six challengers battle it out across six rounds while a spotlight patrols the studio eliminating contestants. The challengers' motivation is to do whatever it takes to stay out of the light.

As dramatic lightning and a thundering soundtrack distract them, contestants face simultaneous quick-fire questions and physical trials, while trying to build up a £3,000 daily prize pot - certainly more gothic drama than the daytime quiz audience are perhaps used to.

But with the rising popularity of horror, non-scripted producers and youth-skewing broadcasters are also keen to crack the entertainment take on this genre too – namely game shows that test the nerves of participants, with scary scenarios they have to try to withstand for cash.

Back in October 2019 ITV2 went for the scream movie spoof *Killer Camp*, while January 2020 saw the launch of BBC3 game **Don't Scream** and Netflix's comedic French effort **Until Dawn**. In *Don't Scream* trios of friends begin the game with £5,000. They must hold their nerve as they navigate through four separate chambers to complete different tasks, with shocks and scares at every turn.



In *Until Dawn* – one of Netflix's first original French unscripted commissions – a trio of comedians spend a night in a haunted location, all trying to scare the others more as they take on their assigned tasks. At dawn the one deemed most scared undergoes a punishment.

In both cases the problem is the same as with all fright TV games – more tense to play than to watch – but *Don't Scream* has a clearer and higher-stakes game show premise, as contestants lose money for every scream (as with *Flinch* and *Don't!*). Recent BBC research has shown that young audiences can't be bothered with lengthy character intros, so this show cuts straight to the action as the players are thrown into the creepy shopping centre set and the challenges.

Meanwhile the French version bases itself much more around the comedy and the collaborative pranking than any genuine terror. In constant contact with the other comedians (by phone/walkie talkie) when they perform their individual tasks, there is plenty of opportunity for witty commentary between the cast, and this largely carries the show.

Alongside 'don't flinch/ scream/ make a noise', the other human experiment to come back time and again in a game show guise is 'don't sleep!'

Back in the early 2000s, the success of *Big Brother* led to a raft of bigger scale, noisy, pseudo-scientific game show experiments, which put contestants into extreme situations and observed the results. *Shattered* (Channel 4, 2004, Endemol) was one of the most infamous – depriving its guinea pig participants of sleep, then setting them challenges which scientists and psychologists would observe. The contestant who stayed awake the longest would win a £100,000 cash prize (in the end £97,000 for 178 hours by winner Clare Southern, as deductions were made every time one of them fell asleep.)

The producers set contestants daily “you snooze, you lose” tasks between 2am and 4am, when the body most craves sleep, and some entertainingly cruel challenges: contestants read bedtime stories by “grandmothers” in overheated rooms, made to cuddle teddy bears or sit in a comfy chair watching paint dry. The show did provide insights into the science of sleep, but was mostly entertaining for the agony and discombobulated behaviour of those trying desperately to be last man standing.

Even at the time, there was an outcry about the risks to health, and the format had to be tweaked at the last minute to allow for some ‘rest periods’ – somewhat undermining its premise. But nowadays guidelines and mental health concerns would probably make the show very difficult to produce. Instead Netflix’s recent game show version ***Awake: The Million Dollar Game*** (June 2019, 25/7 Productions) asked its competitors to stay awake for just 24 hours counting quarters, before then being asked to compete in various challenges to win the money: challenges to test their hand-eye coordination (how many needles can they thread!), their reaction time (how quickly can they smash an egg in their face!) and their logical skills (match the sound to the animal!).



While the premise was grabby, and the exhausted, delirious challenges quite fun, a little too much of the game hung on the quarter counting and a complicated buyout mechanic, and it quickly exhausted any minor aspects of ‘science’ or experiment promised by the sleep deprivation concept.

With a few minor structural tweaks, and a good bank of challenges to draw on, this could have been a reasonably entertaining returning game, but there is no sign that it will be back – perhaps another sign of how difficult it is to construct a game/ experiment with lasting interest.

Now ProSieben has tried the idea again, with new Saturday primetime game show ***Wer schläft, verliert!*** (*Tr. Who sleeps, loses!*, March 2020) featuring eight celebrities living in a house, and competing in games of skill and alertness... after 60 hours of sleep deprivation. Sleep expert Prof. Dr. Ingo Fietze provided the ‘science bit’ to turn this game into light experiment, and the show rated strongly, with 1.51 million strong audience (a well above average 5.2% overall share and 13.2% target group share



A14-49). The show ranked top for the night and boosted the channel's year-to-date share by 10%.

Indeed the show was never originally intended to be a primetime game show, but rather a factual series exploring the effects of sleep deprivation. German broadcaster ProSieben had been planning a themed week around the airing of a TV movie called *9 Days Awake*, based on a bestselling book and the initial idea was to create a factual show to sit alongside it.

“But because there was a need to fill a Saturday evening primetime slot, this original concept quickly evolved into more of an entertainment-led idea with factual elements – like explanatory graphics and expert commentary in the studio,” explains **Sebastian von Wurmb-Seibel**, MD at producer FischWillWurm Media.



The resultant format saw eight celebrities move into a house and face the challenge of staying awake for 60 hours, while being filmed 24/7. They then immediately joined a live game show and competed against each other in a series of challenges designed to highlight issues caused by lack of sleep – such as the loss of hand-eye coordination.

After each challenge, the two worst performers battle each other in a duel, with the loser facing the ultimate test: to stay awake while tucked-up in a cozy bed. Sleep experts analyse the stars' responses to tiredness throughout and comment on their reactions during the challenges, with the winner the last contestant to fall asleep.

“All the challenges are designed to highlight the deficits that occur when someone is sleep deprived, such as loss of concentration, fine motor skills, endurance, reaction and memory,” explains Von Wurmb-Seibel. Examples include contestants having to count the number of ‘ands’ read during a bedtime story, while another challenge sees those taking part having to recreate shapes originally built by children using play bricks, after looking at them for just 10 seconds.

“Roughly half of the games are played in the house and half in the studio after the contestants have been awake for 60 hours,” adds Von Wurmb-Seibel. “This is so their abilities – with and without sleep – can be compared.”

Going back closer to the original *Shattered* premise in its 24/7 ‘living together’ set-up, the show was a well-produced combination of celebrity reality experiment and studio game show – a tricky mix to pull off, but one which seems to have worked here.

Another interesting ‘human experiment game show’ currently being pitched in the US by Hitchhiker TV (part of Objective Media Group) also looks to combine a reality build-up with a high-stakes final hour in a similar way.

In ***Exit Strategy*** six, time-challenged contestants enter a ‘games hub’ on a mission to exit exactly 24 hour later for a shot at winning a share of a cash prize. The catch is that there are no time tracking devices in the hub, so with a series of prize-building physical and mental challenges to complete, contestants have to rely on their own strategy for counting the minutes ticking by. They decide whether to team

up and take shifts, or go it alone – and only those who leave the hub within the last hour get to share a slice of the prize pot.

It's an intriguing concept that builds on some of the bodyclock aspects of *Shattered/ Awake/ Wer schläft, verliert!*, and even *Big Brother*, where the lack of clocks, watches or phones was always a major pressure point on group behaviour.

While there may have to be tweaks to how some of these group experiment contests can be made during social distancing, ideas which weave human behavioural science into a game show context will continue to flourish.

d) DIVERSE TWISTS

One small trend to note – larger in other factual and reality genres but still creeping into gameshows – is the hunger to feature, celebrate and even build gameplay around diversity. This could be diversity of contestant, or of creator's viewpoint, but it is being driven most strongly by the international streamers and digital platforms.

Netflix has made a point of bring diverse, very international casts into all of its reality contests – from *Too Hot To Handle*, to *Queer Eye*, to *Drive*, and it's a policy that is working well for them in engaging young, globalised audiences.

Now premium short-form mobile platform Quibi has been trying to carve its own niche here – with less success than Netflix so far, at a time when few of us are 'on the go', but with a few interesting examples that could impact the mainstream. Whether or not Quibi survives in its current form, it is currently a useful platform for testing and scaling up ideas and talent from other sources – YouTube, podcasts, comedy shows and the like – and the world of game shows can benefit as much as any other genre.

Recent launch **Gayme Show** is an example of the kind of show it can be doing better than its less well-funded short-form rivals – a well-made, glitzy game show with tried and tested existing IP from an established creator, that nonetheless might not have stretched to a traditional 30' slot. Based on a live show from hosts Matt Rogers (*Las Culturistas* podcast) and stand-up comedian Dave Mizzoni, it features two straight contestants competing in physical and mental challenges to be dubbed an honorary gay.



While its stage show roots show through, it still works as a small-screen proposition, with plenty of energy, fun hosts and games. and enough special guests to make it feel like a quality production.

And alongside that, Quibi also has **Let's Go Atsuko!** - billed as a 'woke' Japanese game show from comedian Atsuko Okatsuka.

In the series, games master Okatsuka leads two civilian contestants through the surreal universe inside her grandma's fridge. In every episode, each contestant — perhaps unwisely — tells Okatsuka one thing they love and one thing they fear.

These facts are then used against them to create tailor-made challenges that test the players' "street smarts."

It's totally surreal, but given the renewed thirst for 'crazy Asian' fun, a timely commission. What's great is that Okatsuka manages to play up to the wacky Japanese stereotype while simultaneously debunking it.

e) 'LAST MAN STANDING' WHITTLE-DOWN

In recent K7 World Entertainment and Reality reports we've featured quite a few 'mass whittle-down' game shows. To stand out in a crowded marketplace many traditional broadcasters have been opting for scale to make a splash – scale of set, scale of challenge, and sometimes scale of cast. A common starting point has been to assemble a larger-than-usual number of contestants, and then find quirky ways to whittle them down to the last man standing.

So we've had ITV piloting its new large-scale whittle show **The 1%**, with comedian Lee Mack fronting as 100 contestants compete on an individual keyboard to answer brain teasers.

We've also had BBC1 launching its latest Saturday night game show effort, the Jason Manford-fronted **First and Last**, featuring 11 contestants competing in a range of silly and play-along at home games and trying not to come either first or last. It's the most recent in its long line of slightly similar, low-fi silly game efforts, from *The Button* (families attempting tasks set in their own homes, May 2019) to *The Time It Takes* (Joe Lycett gets contestants to estimate how long a comedy task will take, thereby determining how long they have to answer questions, November 2018).



In this case the concept is all about celebrating mediocrity – being neither the best nor the worst; a premise nicely reinforced by self-deprecating host Manford (in a classic British style that may not work everywhere.) However its nail-biting final round has genuine strategy and tension to it, as the final three contestants have two minutes to decide how much they want to take home from a briefcase containing £10,000. The contestant that chooses the median amount of money walks away with that sum.

The concept is not a million miles away from that of the Primitives format **99 To Beat**, which got attention at MIPCOM 2019 and launched in January 2020 on SBS6 in the Netherlands, following a successful run on Één in Belgium, where it is known as *Homo Universalis*. In Belgium it's now into its third season, where it airs as a segment of long-running factual entertainment show *Ledereen Beroemd*: 100 people compete in outlandish daily challenges - think catching potatoes on a fork - and one person is eliminated each day. Finally the last contestant standing is named 'Homo Universalis' and wins the trip of a lifetime. So the goal isn't necessarily to be the



best, just not the worst - with the aim to stay in the game as each round eliminates one person - 99 times.

According to Primitives, rights were picked up in the US, Germany, France (WeMake), Australia (Seven), New Zealand (Seven) and Norway (Monday Media) prior to MIPCOM 2019 kicking off, so other buyers now have a choice on which of these 'you don't have to come first to win' formats to pick up. And of course it can work as both a daily strip - with returning contestants you really get to know, and one eliminated each day - or as a larger scale, mass elimination, weekly primetime show.

Belgium and the Netherlands are collectively very busy in this sort of quiz/game area right now, with Één's revival of its old format **1 Jaar Gratis** (*1 Year Off*) also launching in January to excellent ratings. Off air since 2008, the new version, hosted by Thomas Vanderveken, kicked off as the most-watched entertainment show of the day, with a good 35% share of the 18-44 demo. The format is unchanged from its original form, with 16 contestants battling on quiz questions over 13 weeks, with one eliminated each week. The last one standing takes home the salary of the highest-paid contestant, which is only revealed at the end of the process.



With the whittling down happening over the course of the series, and significant money riding on who everyone turns out to be, the show becomes as much about knowing and assessing one's fellow candidates, and about strategising, as about their quiz knowledge. Original host and co-creator of the format Herman Van Molle apparently used to always eat with the contestants between the recordings to really get to know them: "that way you can find out who's playing with whom and so on." Indeed the sixth series, back in 2007 caused quite a stir because four candidates successfully conspired to reach the final, with just one of them eventually going home with the money.

While this may not have been the intention of the original format, there is certainly something to be said for the types of ongoing reality-style storylines and strategies an ongoing, real-time, whittling-down quiz of this nature can produce.

Meanwhile in the Netherlands SBS6 has also recently reimagined their studio entertainment show **Mensenkennis** (*Human Knowledge*). The previous two seasons featured celebrity-based games, where stars guessed how regular people would react in various situations, as witnessed via hidden camera footage. In the new season, 100 people - worth a collective 10,000 euros - now try to predict how people will behave when faced with those same types of dilemmas. Those who guess incorrectly will drop out, leaving those who remain standing at the end to divide the prize money between them.



In Germany ProSieben has had a recent success with their new comedy whittle-down game **Balls to Dare** (*Balls – Für Geld mache ich alles*), which premiered earlier this month (May 2020) with a strong 11.8% share in the target group A14-49 – thanks in part to coming off the back of the very popular *Joko and Klaas gegen ProSieben*.



The premise is simple – essentially who will go the furthest in a series of humiliating or painful tasks for cash. Think *Jackass* or *Impractical Jokers* the studio game show – both in set up and humorous tone. A pumped, lively studio audience (aah, remember those..?) makes for a strong atmosphere, as the 50 contestants take on challenges ranging from sitting on a clear toilet seat filled with rats, to having their hair shaved or tasing themselves.

Quite apart from the issue of continuing with studio audiences for these shows, is the question of how keen broadcasters and producers will be to commission shows with such large numbers of participants. As we've already heard from Simon Ingram at Ionoco, the shows they are being asked to work on now are already more in the style of "a gameboard, a host, two contestants, and a 400 sq ft studio rather than a 45000 sq ft stage."

So for a while we may see less of the mass whittle-downs, or at least until the situation improves, or producers become adept and confident in the new protocols. In most territories straightforward studio quiz games are now able to continue – even those that suggest mass participation – as long as those involved are well-managed.

In Belgium, for example, student quiz show **De Campus Cup** (Tr. *The Campus Cup*) has returned on Canvas this month (Monday 18 May 2020) with Otto-Jan Ham once again hosting as 136 students compete in 34 teams from colleges and universities across Belgium. As with so many productions, the line is that that they 'will of course be adhering to social distancing guidelines, with strict safety measures enforced'.



Also in Belgium production company Never Ending Story has been working hard on ways to safely make their long-running, mass participation game show **Septante et Un** (71, running for 17 years on Belgian's French language channel RTL TVI.)

Normally, one player competes face to face with 70 opponents, but when filming resumed this month a digital interface had been introduced which allows the other competitors to join the studio-based remotely from their homes. They are shown in the studio on a huge display which mimics the stand where contestants used to sit.

For the sake of a varied genre, games producers will hope that measures like this are enough to keep the bigger game events going.

f) BEAT THE... CHANNEL/ HOST/ CELEBRITY / SPONSORS

Prosieben's **Joko und Klaas gegen ProSieben** (*Beat the Channel*) is just one of a few 'beat the...' shows out there – with several going down the slightly post-modern route of pitting stars or contestants against the channel or host. In the Joko and Klaas series, the pair complete challenges throughout the show in order to win a 15 minute primetime slot to do whatever they like. As the show has evolved, the duo has become increasingly interesting and daring in how they choose to use that time.



This month (Wednesday 15 May) they gave their 15 minutes to (mostly) showbiz women who illustrated different forms of sexual harassment in *Joko & Klaas Live: Männerwelten* (Tr. *Joko and Klaas: Men's World*). Amidst a wider discussion, they showed audiences explicit pictures sent to women via social media and the clothes women wore when they were raped. Made in cooperation with women's rights organisation Terre de Femmes, the eye-opening segment drew over two million viewers (A3+) and a super strong 16.8% target group.

The 'beat the..' mechanic has been popular in Germany for some time, with Brainpool's **Beat the Star** running on Sat 1 for more than a decade. This time the premise requires the host to make a cash wager to a contestant on a challenge. If the challenger wins, they take home the cash, but if they lose, the money jackpots to the following week.

The show has been adapted in more than 10 countries, and was most recently sold to middle Eastern free-to-air broadcaster MBC where it aired as **Eghleb El Sakka** during the holy month of Ramadan (April 2020).

Meanwhile RTL has been putting a number of stars in the firing line as the 'man (or woman) to beat' in **Bin ich schlauer als...?** (*Am I more intelligent than...*) – including comedian Oliver Pocher (recently returned to RTL after a long hiatus from TV), and Verona Pooth, a TV celebrity famous for her supposedly empty-headed pronouncements.

In each show the celebrity's brain and IQ is tested scientifically beforehand, then revealed during the show, as viewers play along and also test themselves to see how they compare. The show is hosted by Günther Jauch, who was also the celebrity to be tested in the premiere episode), and is a neat way to update the 'test the nation' IQ test shows that were a popular play-along genre in many territories back in the early 2000's.

Not quite 'beat the channel' but another interesting, post-modern take on gamifying the TV world itself, is SBS (Korea)'s variety show **텔레비전에 그게 나왔으면** (Tr. **If That Came on TV**, April 2020), which centres around Product Placement (PPL) on television.



Six celebrities are invited to a small village to take up challenges set by the product placement sponsors: think wearing gym leggings and

jumping up and down on a chair five times without being noticed by the other contestants, or eating a specific food. Winners receive cash prizes for their favourite charity.

With Asian product placement considerably more overt and accepted than in some other territories, there is something particularly intriguing and subversive about the idea, which more or less sends up the whole idea of 'PPL'. Like a product placement 'who-done-it', competitors must work out which star is wearing/eating/displaying what product placement item, to the amusement of viewers who are in on the challenges from the start.

The lively, excitable cast throw themselves into the games with great enthusiasm, and it's certainly refreshing to see brands and products messed around with openly, rather than slyly slipped in in the usual way. Following the two broadcast pilots the show has now been commissioned for a full season by SBS.

As viewers become ever more savvy about the nuts and bolts of TV production, and the 'personalities' of their favourite channel brands, we could start to see more shows like this that start to gamify the whole game show process itself.

In the UK, audiences recently flocked to ITV's series **Quiz**, which dramatized the saga of cheating contestant Major Charles Ingram on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* back in 2001. Complete with a starry line-up of actors playing various channel heads, commissioners and producers, it took its audience inside the mechanics of making a quiz show in fascinating detail – down to the 'club' of fans selling tips to beat the *Millionaire* system. Perhaps there is more to be done with this quiz/ game behind-the-scenes approach, as *Popstars* and *Pop Idol* once did for talent shows.



g) BEST OF THE BEST: CELEBRATIONS, REVIVALS AND 'ULTIMATE' TESTS

Because there's one thing that will be inevitable during this period and post-coronavirus, and that's that there will be an awful lot of content celebrating, revisiting and re-staging our favourite TV moments and formats – game shows included.

Not only will it give broadcasters the chance to plug holes with much-loved, escapist archive, but we'll also get the chance to delve deeper into the stories behind famous games and contestants – and perhaps see if we can beat them now.

In the US ABC's ***Jeopardy! The Greatest of All Time*** dominated the US ratings in January 2020, with the three most successful *Jeopardy!* contestants of all time (Ken Jennings, Brad Rutter and James Holzhauer) competing in a best of seven tournament that marked the franchise's first return



to network primetime in thirty years. In a brave scheduling move that really ramped up the event feel, the series was set to run until one player notched up three wins - something that eventually happened after four episodes.

With the series averaging almost 15 million viewers in same-day ratings, only NBC's Golden Globes coverage (18.32 million) has rated higher in terms of entertainment programming so far this season. To say these kind of consistent ratings are unmatched in 2020 is an understatement.

In the event, Ken Jennings, holder of the longest winning streak (74 wins) on the show, triumphed again, with three wins to Holzhauer's one and Rutter's zero, and a \$1 million prize to show for his efforts. This was despite the fact that last year Holzhauer broke records for the best one-day earnings on the show (he also had the second-best, third-best and fourth-best one-day earnings), still behind Ken Jennings who won \$2.5m over 74 episodes in 2004, but at one point looking set to beat his record in half the time.

Unlike *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, or many of the other big money game shows, this time the winner was guaranteed to walk away with that full amount, and the hefty sum plus stellar ratings proved that trusted old game show formats can still create a splash in a fractured viewing landscape. With so many years of quiz history to draw on, there is plenty of opportunity to keep going back to find the 'best of the best', pitting previous winners against each other like this, for some time yet.

It's all part of a trend towards looking for the 'ultimate' – as seen in Channel 4's **Jon Snow's Very Hard Questions**, which pits the kind of quiz-show supergeeks (the ones that might have provided those *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* tips) against each other. With some *Mastermind* alumnae among them, there's definitely a push to make this an 'ultimate' badge of quiz show honour, with a leaderboard and only two teams set to make the final.



While that show was a fairly small, niche proposition on More4, ITV drew in much bigger audiences this month for its own 'best of the best' as it pitted contestants against a full line-up of its elite quizzers in *The Chase* primetime spin-off **Beat the Chasers**.

Stripped across the week, with a big shiny studio, it felt like entertainment event TV when much of that ilk was sadly absent – and ratings were excellent as a result (averaging 6.33m/ 24.24%, well above the slot average). Contestants came and went a little fast to really root for them too much, but with host Bradley Walsh and the 'supergroup' of Chasers the real assets here, that hardly mattered. Like quiz *Gladiators*, or the *Dragon's Den* team, the fun was in finally seeing them all together, interacting and pooling their knowledge to hold off all challengers.

ITV have plenty of form in this area, having previously aired *Gameshow Marathon* - a series of revived game show classics hosted by Ant and Dec, to celebrate the channel's 50th anniversary in 2005, and sold to eight territories; and more recently

Quizmaster (December 2019) - a 90 minute special that pitted previous contestants of major TV game shows against each other. Hosted by presenter Jeremy Vine, it featured 15 previous contestants of shows including *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, *Mastermind*, *The Chase*, *Fifteen To One* and *University Challenge*.

This month will also finally see the launch of their long-gestating seven-part series of **Alan Carr's Epic Gameshow** (ITV, Saturday 30 May). This time host Alan is presiding over super-sized revivals of iconic titles *Play Your Cards Right*, *Take Your Pick*, *Strike It Lucky*, *Bullseye*, and *The Price is Right*. Contestants play along for the chance to win either cash rewards or top-of-the-range prizes, and each of the classic formats has been updated with a new endgame.



While the series is essentially *Gameshow Marathon 2* and was conceived long before the pandemic struck, its celebratory nostalgia will seem like perfect timing, despite the long wait.

As with *Gameshow Marathon* it will be another opportunity for ITV to test which classic games (and new endgames) go down best with the audience and could warrant a full revival. Alan Carr has already fronted a non-broadcast pilot of higher-or-lower format *Play Your Cards Right* last year, as well as a one-off festive edition of *The Price Is Right* for Channel 4 two years ago, but neither went to series - then.

In coming months expect to see more shows like this which celebrate and escalate the game show brands and characters we love most, as channels and viewers look for escapism in one of the safest and most adaptable entertainment genres of all.