

PIES IN THE SKY



NETWORK EXECs AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WITH A LOT RIDING ON THE SUCCESS OF THE PRIME-TIME SCHEDULE. Joe D'Amore and Matt Cassidy of D'Amore's Pizza Connection — suppliers of Boston-style pizza pies to *Entourage*, *Las Vegas*, *Two and a Half Men*, *The West Wing*, *Alias*, *According to Jim* and *Charmed* — are looking to make a lot of dough from shows that make it past their freshman year.

"Third-season shows are the best because they have bigger food budgets," says Cassidy, the company's director of operations, who delivers upwards of fifty pies daily to

L.A.-based productions. "Reality TV hurt us because they were getting food from product placement [sponsors]. So it's the real TV shows we like to see come back because we get to feed 'em."

Owner D'Amore, a Boston-born actor-turned-restaurateur, makes the low-cal, low-carb pies that have been a hit on set for a decade. His not-so-secret ingredient? Sodium-free water imported from Boston to make the cracker-thin crust — yes, just like his grandmother used to make. For the *Desperate Housewives*, a favorite is the Pizza Bianco, topped with spinach,

mozzarella, ricotta and roasted peppers. Ray Romano, Charlie Sheen and Josh Duhamel are fans of the classic cheese. For Jennifer Garner, it's tomatoes-basil, and Heather Locklear loves pepperoni and sausage.

"Pizza is one of the few meals you can eat even after you've had three meals," says D'Amore. "It's an easy snack."

Not surprisingly, he disdains much of his L.A. competition, whose pizzas, he contends, fall apart due to an oversoft crust. "I never saw people eat pizza with a knife and a fork until I moved here. The water is what

keeps our crust crisp."

Several years back, D'Amore's beat Wolfgang Puck for "Best Pizza in the West" at the Santa Monica Food Festival and CitySearch.com voted it best in the U.S. Now the company has locations across the L.A. area and even in Las Vegas, but its bread and butter is serving Hollywood.

"We just picked up Joey," Cassidy says. "We didn't know whether it was coming back, but now it's back. Hopefully it will be around for a while."

That's what some NBC execs are hoping, too.

—Janice Rhoshalle Littlejohn

THE VIEW FROM MADISON AVENUE

NOW ON THE AD SIDE, A FORMER NETWORK HEAD PLANS THE NEW FACE OF PROGRAMMING.

Peter Tortorici, onetime president of CBS Entertainment, had little trouble mastering the ways of the ad industry when he signed on last year to run a new entertainment unit of giant media buyer MindShare North America. Although the longtime broadcaster had never worked on Madison Avenue, Tortorici quickly discerned that his television experience was, in essence, a twenty-year tutorial in the art of marketing.

"Every year at the network we came up with a range of new products," he says. "Then we used market research — and our instincts — to determine if the public had any appetite for them. We had to know how to sell and promote them in ways that connected with people, and we had to deliver them. All of that is marketing."

Hey, it might not be the most romantic view of television, but it's practical. And it rings true with advertisers as they struggle to reach consumers tempted by exploding channel choices and new technologies allowing them to skip traditional commercials.

So that's where Tortorici's unit comes in.

Its mission? Solve clients' marketing problems by way of entertainment programming. That can range from bankrolling original shows to helping to dream up and support programming concepts that lend themselves to product placement. It may also mean devising original material for the web and digital phones, among other options.

"We're at a point of change now, in how television is financed and supported," Tortorici says. "We're asking, How else should we be doing things?"

With this question also on advertisers' minds,

Tortorici's role is expanding. The unit he heads was recently renamed Group M Entertainment.

It is now providing counsel to clients of MindShare, in addition to those of two other huge media buying and planning firms, Mediaedgencia and MediaCom (their mutual holding company is Group M, whose parent is WPP Group). Collectively, they represent powerful global brands responsible for billions of dollars in advertising, including American Express, Unilever, Cingular Wireless, Citicorp, Volkswagen, Procter & Gamble and Sears, Roebuck & Company.



Last year, MindShare North America entered into a non-exclusive relationship with ABC, with the parties pledging to collaborate on prime-time programming. One of the fruits of the agreement was *The Days*, a family drama that aired in summer 2004, financed by Sears and Unilever. The show performed well in the ratings but failed to find a home on the network's fall schedule.

That's show biz, as Tortorici well knows. "We're still interested in finding the right kind of business arrangements and creative projects that work for both of us," he says.

Meanwhile, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, a huge hit for ABC that is sponsored by MindShare client Sears, is a key example of successful product integration. Of course, not everyone appreciates the trend. A vocal contingent views the increased presence of advertiser-influenced content as a threat to the integrity of the medium.

"Product integration, brand integration and product placement are all tactics that should be evaluated like everything else," Tortorici says. "When done poorly, they should be punished and criticized." But when properly executed, the result is tasteful and seamless — the way advertisers want it. "The last thing a brand wants is to alienate a potential customer." —Jennifer Penellton