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## Blood, sweat & T-shirts - Reaching audiences online through influencers

One of the core values at Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle is to increase awareness about each other and the world around us and strengthen Finnish society and culture. This task is something that we take great pride in, and that is why we want to create content that reflects this for each age group. But reaching a young adult audience online has become increasingly difficult in the past ten years. So many new platforms have popped up, and the availability and amount of audiovisual content have multiplied so fast that it is difficult for a Public Service Broadcaster to keep up. So when we look at our values and what we want to achieve, we have to start thinking in new ways. Content has to be engaging and catch the interests of the audience in new ways.

That combination of engaging content and awareness is something that we at Yle wanted to accomplish when we commissioned the Finnish version of Blood, Sweat & T-shirts. The show had debuted on BBC Three nearly a decade ago. The original show was published and broadcast on Yle eight years ago and was well-received. We knew that the concept was great. But we also knew that to reach our target audience, consisting of Millennials and Generation Z, we had to pay attention to the casting and social media aspects early on. Of the many social media platforms, Instagram and YouTube were our primary focus. Those two platforms have the most daily and weekly usage in Finland in this target audience.

Another way to tackle the challenge of reach was to utilize influencers as cast members. It is nothing new, as influencers have become more and more common in reality and other TV show concepts. So to see which type of cast would suit our target audience the best, we needed more information from our target audience. We used feedback from two focus groups to gather this data. These groups had 10-15 young adults from different backgrounds and ages between 18-25 years. They all consumed media in different ways and also had diverse views on fashion and clothes. We used these focus groups on two separate occasions,

first during pre-production. To gather information on what type of people and which influencers people would like to see in the show. And also to see what aspects of our topic drew the most interest. What surprised us in this initial session was that the groups wanted us to focus on the informational side of the issue. The audience wanted to get more information on how clothes are made and what global impacts it has. Later on, during post-production, we used the focus groups again. We wanted input on our social media content. These sessions helped us choose the type of content we should focus on in our marketing and the tone of voice for our content.

When we looked at the initial input from our focus groups, we knew that we wanted our cast to reflect different ways of looking at clothes and fashion. We wanted to have someone with more knowledge and understanding on the environmental side, someone with just a consumer attitude and maybe someone that had experience in the fashion industry. So we did not just want the biggest influencers we could get. That is because the younger audience is increasingly sensitive towards performance, fake emotions or acting. The influencers needed to understand both the informative value and the entertainment value of the series. So not all cast members had a big following on social media. But all of them had a personal connection towards fashion, and they were interested in learning more and sharing their thoughts with the audience.

The other thing that we learned from working with influencers is that we need to create opportunities for content creation. Being part of the cast is a huge opportunity to gain more followers and visibility. But the possibility to experience new things, places and create unique content abroad was equally important. We didn't want to force this content creation for our influencers while filming, but we allowed them to do so. Pictures and short videos on social media were permitted. Also, the production contracts did not include any mandatory social media publishing. This contract provided a safe space for influencers to create their content and not feel pressured towards certain types of content. Later during post-production, we gathered a set of pictures and video files for each cast member to use on social media. When the series was published, some cast members posted more than others. This point was where the personal attachment to the topic and the values of the show became important. One of the influencers felt



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the importance of our series very profoundly. She wanted to make a four-part video series on her personal YouTube channel. The series documented her experience while travelling and her outlook on fashion after the series had ended filming. That Youtube series reached well beyond 500 thousand views on YouTube and drew traffic to watch the Blood, sweat & T-shirts series on Yle Areena streaming service. The YouTube series was in line with our message and helped the main series gain reach. The best part for us was that each of our influencers helped us get the word out in a more personal and relatable way than a public service media like Yle using marketing ever could.

So the tone of voice and content of our series gained influence from the audience. The audience wanted more information about the global impact of the fashion industry. We gathered influencers who were interested in finding out more and put themselves on the line. The series had real emotion, interest and message. These were some of the main things that made the series great. But when we began sending out press releases for Blood, Sweat and T-shirts. We noticed that the topic resonated with larger online communities as well. It was easy to reach out to different groups, fashion bloggers, non-profit organizations, fair trade organizations, and news outlets. Fashion was a relatable topic. Also, the idea of sending young influencers to sweatshops like working conditions drew interest as well. But behind this response was also the idea of moving on from fast fashion. Towards a more sustainable and ecological fashion. Fashion industry ties in with many issues like global warming and equality. These are increasingly important issues for the Millennial and Gen Z target audiences. These global issues were always in the background of our planning. So it was great to see that it ended up helping us reach even bigger online groups.

So what are the main takeaways from this project? I would sum it with the following three points. Include your audience and cast in the process of making the series, be interested in what they want and what you want to achieve and leave a lasting impression on them with your content.