Daring to be different is best way to win buyers’ hearts and minds

THE BATTLE to be best comes down to daring to be different, according to delegates at this week’s MIPCOM Junior Buyers’ Summit. Buyers want programming to differentiate them from their rivals — and it is very, very hard to find. “Having screened all morning, I can say that there’s a lot of similar product around,” said Nicole Keeb, head of international co-productions and acquisitions, children’s and youth, at Germany’s ZDF. “As a broadcaster, you want unique properties with heart and soul.”

Marc Buhaj, senior vice-president of programming at Jetix Europe, agreed. “There is often a great reluctance to go beyond what’s working now,” he said. “But hit shows like Pokemon, SpongeBob and High School Musical were all very fresh when they launched. They all came out of left field and were a gamble.”

Keeb noted a new trend for acquired live action: “Just as Lost and Desperate Housewives worked well in primetime, now the same thing is happening in children’s. The Australian show H2O: Just Add Water is a good example.”

According to Pierre Belaisch, deputy managing director of programming for France’s major bouquet of children’s channels, Canal J, Tiji, Filles TV and Gulli, the real creativity is often to be found in the financing. “Web content has to be fast, fun and cost effective,” he said. “Can we adapt this to help reduce broadcast budgets?”

Creative approaches are also the forte of Mostapha Mellouk, deputy managing director of the two-year-old channel, Al Jazeera Children’s. “If we are to buy a property, we want to see it acknowledge our existence,” he said. “There was a 24-part factual series recently. We liked it but it had no episodes about our part of the world. So we called the producers and suggested they add four episodes set in the Arab world. They agreed, we co-produced them and we bought the show.”

Tim Brooke-Hunt, executive head of children’s at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, is in charge of two channels offering seven hours of children’s product a day. “I’m open to product across all genres, including educational,” he said. “I want properties that are different. What don’t I want? That’s easy. Boring, samey rubbish.”