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## Murdoch spells out Ten agenda

PUBLISHED: 11 Apr 2011 PRINT EDITION: 11 Apr 2011

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Lachlan Murdoch's first public turn as Ten Network's interim chief executive last week received good marks from media analysts, most of whom welcomed his frank assessment of the television and outdoor advertising company's woes.

Given Ten's February-half results had been flagged when chief executive Grant Blackley was removed on February 23, Murdoch used the official release of the numbers to explain its key problems and how they are being tackled.

He did a good job of outlining how Ten's cost-revenue balancing act had got out of whack and what was being done to fix it, including a cost-cutting program and a revamp of the low-rating, all-sport digital channel One.

But several key questions remained unanswered, including Ten's exact cost-reduction target and how the lacklustre ratings of the main Ten channel can be improved.

Removing highly-paid executives such as Blackley, executive chairman Nick Falloon and head of sport David White will trim Ten's costs, as will the recent decision to ditch the state-based 6.30pm news programs.

But the impact of those moves on Ten's TV costs, which will be an estimated \$700 million in 2010-11, is not clear. Axing *6.30pm With George Negus* would produce an instant cost saving, but no one is sure what Ten could replace it with.

Eleven, the three-month-old digital channel aimed at people aged 13 to 29, is performing well and will be largely left alone in the Murdoch-led overhaul of Ten.

Media buyers say the changes to One – which from May 8 will run sports on the weekends and male-orientated movies, documentaries and series such as *Sons of Anarchy*, *Cops* and *Ice Road Truckers* on weeknights – is a smart move and should lift its ratings.

But the Ten channel is the main game: it is where Ten's TV division generates its biggest audience and highest ad rates.

The success of Eleven, absence of *So You Think You Can Dance* (which was dropped last year) and weaker ratings of programs such as *Good News Week* and *Talkin' 'Bout Your Generation* have eroded the main Ten channel's audience this year.

Its numbers will improve when *MasterChef 3* starts on May 1 and new local shows such as *The Renovators*, *Class Of* and *Can of Worms* might rate well.

Murdoch thinks more can be done to milk consumers' perception of the Ten brand as "bold, youthful, confident and slightly irreverent".

Yes, but part of the Ten channel's problem is that programs such as *6.30pm With George Negus*, *The Good Wife*, *House* and *Blue Bloods* are not bold, youthful or slightly irreverent. They sit oddly on a channel aimed primarily at people aged 18 to 49.

But bolstering the "youthful" part of the Ten brand could be tricky, given Eleven is pitched as "distinctly youthful".

The Australian Financial Review

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