

# After 8 Seasons and Multiple Emmys, Pro-Life TV Show Moves Online to Impact More People

With Hollywood awards season in full swing, new dreams are being sparked in emerging filmmakers and producers: How could this important message on my heart reach the masses? Can media truly impact the culture?

Ten years ago, Brad Mattes kicked around the same questions... then he did something about it. Without any background in TV production, his team launched a half-hour show to tell true stories celebrating the unique value of every life. Over eight seasons and 165 episodes, *Facing Life Head-On* ended up three times winning Emmy Awards—the highest honors given to TV programs.

Now Mattes has a new vision, choosing to fold their successful TV show and change the format to get their pro-life stories in front of more people online. Having raised four children with his wife Ellen, Mattes works with Life Issues Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, which has become one of America's foremost pro-life educational groups.

This week, Brad Mattes joined thousands of Christian communicators at the annual NRB Convention in Nashville, Tennessee—where he accepted the 2016 Radio Impact Award for pro-life media his team creates for broadcast over the airwaves.

**Bound4LIFE:** Congratulations on winning this award from the National Religious Broadcasters, it certainly speaks to the significance of your team's work.

**Brad Mattes:** Thank you. For me, it's a dream realized in many ways because the best of the best in Christian broadcasting

compete for these awards.

It means a lot to me because it's coming from my peers and people whom I admire so greatly. Those of us involved in producing *Life Issues* consider it an honor and point heavenward for God to receive the glory.

**Bound4LIFE:** Before getting to the TV program, now becoming an online show, tell us about the radio feature being recognized today. How has it evolved over time?

**Brad Mattes:** *Life Issues* started with Dr. Jack Wilke as a five-minute program. Back in 1985, they recorded on reel-to-reel tape. Then we went to cassette. Then we thought we had the world by the tail when we moved to CDs!

Today we're conveying as much information in a 60-second program, and we're distributing it by satellite and FTP. Technology has enabled us to communicate so quickly and easily now. People are hearing the program and taking it to heart.

Now if something big comes up, like a Supreme Court ruling, I run to recording studio here, and within a couple hours, it can be broadcast to 4 million listeners—which is a conservative estimate of our weekly radio audience. In 2003, we were on about 330 radio outlets. After we changed the format and distribution partner, now we're on more than 1,100 outlets. That's a lot of bang for the buck.

Radio is underestimated, as it's such a personal experience for people. People have relayed to me passionately how certain radio programs have impacted them, yet the content is packed into just 48 seconds when you consider the open and closing music.

**Bound4LIFE:** While a daily radio feature takes commitment, TV production is another level entirely. Why did you decide to launch *Facing Life Head-On* as a half-hour TV show?

**Brad Mattes:** We have seen for decades how major media twist coverage of life issues, edit our words present the other side more favorably and try to present our side as harshly as they can.

What if we could present our stories unfiltered by media bias? Back in 2006, I had the idea that, if we could get funding, we should launch our own TV program. I was determined that we would do it well, or we wouldn't do it all. The production quality would reflect on the pro-life cause at large; we didn't want the world to think this movement operated out of someone's garage. That may have been true in the late 1970s, but we have become more media-savvy.

Thankfully, we launched with supporters ready to back three seasons of the show. That gave us a strong start. Facing Life Head-On has now garnered three regional Emmy Awards, among other awards, which are a testament to these documentary stories exceeding even what is being produced in the mainstream.

The ones who made this program what it is are people like Alveda King, Melissa Ohden and Olympic athlete Tasha Danvers Smith whom we interviewed—so many incredible people over 165 episodes. Really, these awards belong to the entire pro-life movement.

As a host, I try to stay out of the way and let the stories be the message. It's been a process where I've learned immensely from our guests, with whom I continue to be dear friends.

From the second season onward, *Facing Life Head-On* reached about 95 percent of U.S. households, and we were seen across Canada. Unfortunately, the several networks we were on couldn't afford to pay for the Nielsen ratings service—the costs range between \$250,000-500,000 per year.

We were never able to definitively estimate how many people were watching the program. That's one of the reasons that led

to us to wanting to do something different that we could measure in a more exact way.

**Bound4LIFE:** Some criticize pro-life media for preaching to the choir. How do you respond to that and what have you heard from audiences?

**Brad Mattes:** The email and snail mail we receive suggest the show has had a real impact, many contacting us to say, "You changed my mind on abortion, and I will not consider it any longer."

One lady named Beverly wrote that she was watching the program, and afterward she cancelled the abortion she had scheduled. Now, she defined herself as a Christian—so we do need to preach to the choir!

Beverly thought she was all alone in the issues she was facing: being pregnant, no husband, no help and nearly no money. Then she was inspired by the guest we had on, how she managed to keep her baby and thrive. This guest also opened her eyes to the trauma and regret of having an abortion.

We also hear from people who were pro-abortion, not from any religious background, and they responded to the program from a scientific, rational point of view. The messages convinced them that the choice of life is better than the choice of death.

A lot of people channel-surf. We've heard from many viewers who came across *Facing Life Head-On* without ever before watching the network we were on; it was "by accident" they saw the show, they tell us. But it's not an accident when people are impacted in life-changing ways—it's God directing people, and we wouldn't get very far if we tried to claim credit for all that.

Even if it saved one baby, it would be worth it. We are fortunate to know that God has used the show to save more than

that, and we're likely unaware of many more.

**Bound4LIFE:** How is your faith integrated into the show?

**Brad Mattes:** Our goal with this show is for the faith element to be soft and subtle.

However, we also do not censor out people's religious faith. When it is expressed naturally, in the process of telling a story, we are able to share the gospel message on many occasions in a soft, gentle way. I think for those who do not have faith or a salvation experience yet, that is the best way to do it.

Behind the scenes, we always bathe everything in prayer—starting before we brainstorm topics for an upcoming show. Then once we have one, we pray God will put all the pieces in place for the right guests to participate.

Things happen at times that convince us of other spiritual forces at work, trying to throw a wrench into a really powerful program. We assume that when there's uncommon problems, that particular show has an uncommon message the enemy doesn't want to see broadcast. That just makes us pray all the more, and work all the harder to see things come together.

**Bound4LIFE:** What can we expect in the new online series *Facing Life Now*?

**Brad Mattes:** The pace of our society has sped up. Many things are competing for our attention on the internet. If we're not being watched, we're not relevant and wasting our time.

As I mentioned earlier, we couldn't really identify how many people were watching the half-hour TV show. Addressing the donors who underwrite these programs, I had to say, I just can't provide answers to those questions about our exact reach.

Our team began to do some research, both quantitative and anecdotal. Our programs are all streamed on YouTube; there we can tell how many people watch our programs, how long they watch and where they're watching from—whether it be on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, our home page or another website.

It's a more exact science, being able to monitor the results. All this information informed our decision to move to an online show, where every episode will tell one story between two and five minutes.

*Facing Life Now* will be filmed with the same high production quality, editing and HD cameras people have appreciated about our programs. Now we'll boil it down to a few minutes. We did a test case in December, and we reached about 100,000 people with short videos—at a time when many were distracted with the bustle of Christmas.

We plan to produce 18 new videos a year, releasing one about every three weeks; we'll include an incentive for people to share the videos. It's all geared toward an audience that's online, in a format they'll enjoy with a look and feel they'll be comfortable watching.

What we do already with radio, we plan to implement with *Facing Life Now*. We want to be very relevant to news as it's breaking. That's why we have the word "now" in the title. We'll send a crew out to Texas, for instance, when there's something major happening in the State Capitol.

Before this point, it took us a week to do post-production. Now we'll have a format where, within 24 hours, we can have it online and get the real story in front of people.

*Visit for more on Facing Life Now.*

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