



## An antidote to corporate television

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Billed as a leftwing contender to rival the might of CNN and Fox, and weighing in with a annual budget of just \$25m, Independent World Television (IWT) plans to create a news network that will counter a corporate media culture that has become infamous for placing profits above the public interest. The mission is to convince an "internet army" of half a million donors to contribute \$50 each to secure the \$25m that the network needs to fund its first year of broadcasting. It is a big ask. The network will take no commercials, sponsorship or government funding. IWT plans to start broadcasting to more than 25m US homes by 2007.

The network is the vision of Paul Jay, the Toronto-based director of the award-winning documentary Return to Kandahar. "With the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, we saw much of television news at its very worst," he says. "What we need is a network where journalists don't need to worry about the interests of their ownership, about selling commercials nor worry about government funding or interference."

The network launched its website on Thursday. No rolling news yet, but there was a promotional video full of images from Iraq and Afghanistan and unflattering fragments of CNN coverage. It proclaimed: "If the ideals of freedom and liberty are to be more than empty rhetoric, people must form an educated opinion about the issues that concern them."

The station's 86-member advisory board includes some leading lights of the left. Naomi Klein, Gore Vidal, Tony Benn and Greg Philo of the Glasgow Media Group sit alongside chat show veteran Phil Donahue, the art photographer Larry Fink and Peter Jenner, the ex-manager of Pink Floyd.

The campaign will use concerts and media events headlined by "socially-conscious celebrities" to drive fundraising. IWT has already raised \$500,000 seed capital from several foundations and from the Canadian Auto Workers Union, although it plans to "be fully internet small donor funded within three years".

The cause is helped by the presence of Nico Mele, the former webmaster of the Howard Dean campaign. Dean failed to win the Democratic nomination, but not before becoming the most richly funded presidential candidate in history - proof that micro payments can work. In the US, PBS already raises tens of millions through public donations. Is an annual budget of \$25m enough to run a global news network? Despite its claims of unfettered investigative journalism, the old maxim that facts are expensive but opinions are cheap could prove true. The network will initially schedule six hours of programming - one hour of hard news supplemented by current affairs, debate and political satire.

But how global will Independent World Television be? Like baseball's questionably-titled World Series, IWT is pitched at North America, for now, although it will start organising in the UK in the autumn and it is also campaigning in South Africa, India and Australia. Is there an audience outside the US? "Even though the BBC and other European broadcasters do a much better job than the US networks, I don't think they have the freedom to attack stories the way we will," says Jay. "Everybody needs to help build a network that might change US political culture. We are all affected by US policy. Sometimes in a deadly way." See [www.iwtnews.com](http://www.iwtnews.com).