

Angelo con brio!

Politicians who once paid no attention to MTV anchor Angelo Persichilli now seek his advice on how to appeal to Metro's ethnic communities

Politicians seek his advice, court his attention and watch his newscasts with keen interest.

A novice when he started anchoring MTV's Italian language newscast in 1979, 38-year-old Angelo Persichilli now has Canadian politicians snapping at each others heels to get air time on the show.

"At the start we had a hard time getting the politicians to take us seriously, but now they're knocking at our door," boasts MTV president Dan Iannuzzi.

One-hour newscasts

As the station's news director, Persichilli is directly responsible for major daily newscasts in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. His own one-hour Italian language newscasts reach 150,000 viewers. Although that's considerably fewer viewers than Global's 350,000 and CBC *Newshour's* 300,000, politicians appreciate that Persichilli's show penetrates a substantial portion of the ethnic audience.

"The Tories are desperate to make inroads into the ethnic communities in Toronto," says Liberal MP John Nunziata. "And their one means is Angelo. Politicians are grateful to appear on his show."

Persichilli's first real challenge as MTV anchorman came in 1980 with the tragic earthquake in southern Italy, when he established a communication link between Italy and MTV, enabling him to give hourly reports to viewers on the search for and identification of victims.

Since then, his reputation as a hardnosed political interviewer has enabled him to interview a formidable array of both Canadian and foreign prime ministers, premiers and dignitaries.

Persichilli zeroed in, for example, on Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and wife Mila



Angelo Persichilli is MTV's news director and also hosts their Italian language newscast, weekdays, 8 p.m., ch. 47

prior to the 1984 federal election. "Mila has a strong influence over her husband where multiculturalism is concerned," he says. He was also the first Toronto TV newsman to interview Opposition leader John Turner during the Liberal leadership convention.

Last June, Italy's President Francesco Cossiga granted him an exclusive two-hour interview at the Quirinale palace in Rome.

"I was quite honored," says the MTV newsman. "The president rarely gives that much time to the press, let alone in his private quarters.

"I find myself serving two publics; the politicians and the minority groups," he says.

"My prime role is to explain to the viewers what's going on in the political arena and what it means to them. As well, I try to communicate the problems facing minority groups to the politicians."

One man who's realized Persichilli's importance is Jim Coutts, former aide to Pierre Trudeau.

"He's one of the best people in journalism today," Coutts says. "He makes it his business to understand the groups that make up Toronto. He's a man you can work with and trust."

Persichilli, however, firmly shuns the idea of entering politics himself.

"I've been approached many times by the various parties to run federally or provincially, but not being fluent in English limits my mobility within the party ranks and that doesn't agree with me," he explains.

As for his newscasts, "our aim is not to be an alternative to English programming but to complement it. We air items from Italy, on the Ital-Canadian community and on international and local items."

Construction sector

He is quick to point out that most of his audience tune in, not because they can't understand English, but because they're getting information the other stations don't provide.

"We air Canadian news, but we approach it from a different angle," he says. "With the last federal budget, for example, we reported on the effect it would have on the Italian community, in particular the construction sector.

"We have two distinct levels of Ital-Canadians, very much different from one another. The immigrants and the Canadian born. Their ideals, their tastes are different but I try to please them both."

Persichilli worked hard to get where he is. As a cub reporter for one of Rome's prestigious newspapers, *Il Tempo*, he quit to get married and come to Canada to work for this country's leading Italian language newspaper, Toronto-based *Il Corriere Canadese*.

In seven years he's gone from being a general reporter to a high-profile TV anchorman. But there is still much to accomplish. "The best stories are those that I haven't written yet . . . that are still to come."

— Angela Bianchi