

## Watching Big Brother Part 1

Bristol based video activists, i-Contact video network, have pulled their short film about 'subvertising from a Channel 4 commissioned 'alternative news' pilot show alt.news at4. They believe the changes demanded by C4, in order for the film to go ahead, were tantamount to self-censorship.

The C4 account differs widely from that of i-contact and poses the question just who is Channel 4 afraid of? The Independent Broadcasting Commission (ITC), whose code they cite as the reason for the cuts, or their advertisers and programme sponsors? Given, in the first quarter of this year, broadcast advertising revenue reduced dramatically it is not surprising many are suspicious it is the latter.

We put this, and other questions, to the Deputy Commissioning Editor, (Independent Film and Video) Jess Search, who was responsible for the commissioning of alt.news@4. Jess has declined to comment to Getethical, informing us she/he has nothing further to add to the responses made on the IndyMedia site.

Censorship or just questionable taste?

It all started just over 6 weeks ago, when i-contact were approached by WarkClements, a Glasgow based independent production company working with C4. As WarkClements explained, in their original email to activists, they wanted 'to challenge the mainstream news agenda, focus attention on topics which are usually swept under the corporate media carpet, empower citizen activists (esp. those with video cameras!) and promote proactive analysis of 'the news' rather than passive consumption of a sanitised object'.

Although trepidatious about working with the mainstream media, i-contact, believing they had some semblance of editorial control, decided to go ahead. Ian Ferguson of i-contact says, 'We were told at the start that we could not target individual corporations for fear of redress. We couldn't systematically pick on individual multinationals, but had to spread it about a bit ...ok ok we thought - we can deal with that. What slowly began to emerge was that we couldn't target ANY multinational corporations at all.'

Subvertising, also known as 'cultural jamming' and most popularised by AdBusters ([www.adbusters.org](http://www.adbusters.org)), a North American 'anti-media' group, has been described as 'the Art of Cultural resistance' Multi-nationals and their brands are turned on their heads with their familiar slogans and messages subverted to undermine the original message, coming up with something a lot nearer to the truth. For example, a famous Adbusters advert transforms Joe Camel into Joe Chemo.

Among the subvertisements i-contact submitted and were subsequently rejected by C4 were the following:

Image: Tory v. Labour

Reason why not: Coca Cola would probably take exception

Image: No Escape from Slow Death

Reason why not: Nescafe would freak!

Changing tack, i-contact proposed making a film about a group of Billboard Activists in Bristol. The footage was to end with a shot of a billboard pulled down by ropes.

Guess what? Just as the final edit was booked, C4 decided the billboard image would have to be removed. At this stage, i-contact took the decision to pull their film. Ian Ferguson, again 'We felt that C4 had given us two options - comply with their demands and submit a shite watered down film or that we withdraw the film. We chose the latter as we felt that C4 were asking us to misrepresent the good folk that we'd been filming'.

In response to this and other comments by i-contact, Jess Search has written 'Our decision to ask for the shot of the billboard coming down to be removed was based on the ITC Code alone and had absolutely nothing to do with the channel's advertising interests.'

## About the Author

The Ethicall Mann loves to wear [ethical clothes](#) from either that shop or from this [green shopping](#) portal!