



## **MEDIA PROFILE: Dobbs helps viewers rediscover the value of 'Moneyline' - A broader-reaching format and the ability to get Bill Gates at the drop of a hat all signal the return of CNN's Moneyline to major-player status. Craig McGuire reports**

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Lou Dobbs and his producers were tailoring the June 28 edition of CNN's Lou Dobbs Moneyline around the financial markets, following a strong midweek surge on Wall Street. That was until the Microsoft story broke. Six hours later, Dobbs was telling viewers, "Tonight, Microsoft wins. An appeals court throws out the Microsoft breakup order. Bill Gates is our guest."

Not many shows have the clout to book Bill Gates on such short notice.

But for Moneyline staff, having the Windows wizard on the show was a chance to ask some probing questions.

Though it was a scramble, Moneyline producers had worked on the Microsoft story for weeks. What they didn't know was the outcome and the timing.

(In fact, Steve Young, who headed Moneyline's coverage, was on vacation in Europe when the story broke).

"We quickly assigned four reporters to look at the story from different angles," says Bill Dorman, Moneyline EP. "They included a hard wrap, what comes next, impact inside the industry, competitors' reaction, context, and background."

Such is today's Moneyline, much broader in scope and friendlier to the less financially savvy than when it launched in the early 1980s.

This year marked the return of anchor Dobbs, lured back by CNN's new owner AOL Time Warner. He resigned as anchor and president of CNN Financial News in June 1999 after repeated run-ins with network brass in Atlanta.

Dobbs headed Web site Space.com before returning to replace co-hosts Stuart Varney and Willow Bay.

Moneyline lost 25% of its audience in Dobbs' absence, falling behind its chief cable competitor, CNBC's Business Center. Since Dobbs' return (with a reported \$4 million salary), the show has gained an estimated 19,000 viewers nightly. According to AC Nielsen numbers for the first seven weeks under the new regime (May 14 - July 29), the show was watched in 190,000 total households. However, it still lags some 39,000 viewers behind Business Center.

In the "Lou's Back" campaign, CNN has trumpeted Moneyline's evolution, marked by more economic coverage and better integration of the worlds of finance, politics, and current events. Moneyline covers everything from the markets to taxes, education, energy, science, and technology.

But Dobbs' ability to draw A-list movers and shakers has made the biggest difference to the show. For example, in addition to Gates and a parade of antitrust attorneys, Moneyline also secured Attorney General John Ashcroft.

If that weren't enough, consider that the same show also included interviews with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld discussing Pentagon spending, and CEO Henry Silverman chronicling the resurgence of Cendant.

"Much of what we do is focused around the high-caliber interviews we offer, including three to four guests nightly," says Dorman. In fact, some of the first guests to be interviewed by Dobbs since his return included Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, William Harrison (in his first interview since becoming CEO of the merged J.P. Morgan Chase), Citigroup topper Sandy Weill, and Ford CEO Jac Nasser.

"We try to be the smartest broadcast in business news," says Dorman.

So, while you may not have a Bill Gates or a Michael Eisner on your client list, you may have an analyst or expert who's tracking the next big thing.

"The closer connection you can make to the news of the day, or of the week - whether it's a trend or news that happened that day - the better shot you have," explains Dorman.

The weekday show is always live, and bookings are made pretty close to show time, so make sure to have your client media trained ahead of time.

"It generally depends on the topic, but usually the news broke the day before or that morning, developed in the afternoon, and our guests comment on it that night," says Dorman.

Analysts and experts are held to a pretty high bar. "They must have a track record of success," says Dorman. "And we keep track of what they

recommend on the show. That's a benchmark that determines if they'll be invited back."

Deadline pressure usually begins as soon as Wall Street markets close at 4pm EST. The hour-long show airs at 6:30pm. "I'm still stunned when people call at 5:30pm and want to have an extended conversation," says Dorman.

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