

whole idea of niche television was ludicrous at the time," says Matthew Fraser, a media columnist at the *National Post* and professor of communications at Ryerson University in Toronto.

Znaimer also created and popularized the concept of "videographer" in which a TV reporter doubles as a camera person. The concept is glamorous and sells well on TV, plus it's a cost-effective way of creating content. The one-person crew also makes for nimble newsgathering.

The studioless station is another Znaimer creation. The ChumCity Building, the site of his broadcasting empire, is wired so that any corner of the building can be used as a set.

"He literally blew away walls and doors, and created an environment that interacted with the cityscape—the studio was spilling onto the street. Previously, studios had been closed spaces and cameras had been stationary," says Fraser, who also wrote a chapter on Znaimer in his 1999 book, *Free-For-All: The Struggle for Dominance on the Digital Frontier*.

Other firsts for Znaimer include Speakers Corner, a video booth where anyone can speak their minds on television. That's Znaimer at his best, because it is simple, inexpensive and takes television to the streets.

These kinds of innovations give the company's programming its unique look and personality. As in any industry, however, good ideas get co-opted by the competition. For example, Alberta's *A-Channel* and Vancouver's *VTV* are

clones of *Citytv*. That has also happened in the United States, where small screen giants such as *CNN* and *MTV* approach television in Znaimer-like ways.

"My fear is that an American will be walking along Queen Street one day, and while passing the station say: 'Look at those guys. They're doing it just like the *Today Show*. Wouldn't that be the American way?'," Znaimer says.

Despite his fears, Znaimer has been recognized for his achievements. His work earned him the Canadian Association of Broadcasters 1998 Gold Ribbon for Broadcast Excellence, Canadian private broadcasting's highest award which recognizes "innovative achievements, imagination, dedication, hard work, and genuine concern for the highest broadcasting standards."

However, some industry observers write Znaimer off as a purveyor of pop journalism and candy-floss content, who doesn't fit into the staid Canadian TV establishment.

"Moses has always been an outsider," Fraser says. "For him, it is a badge of honour. He doesn't lack dinner invitations, but he still maintains his outsider image."

When he goes to Ottawa to attend CRTC hearings, Znaimer subtly thumbs his nose at the rest of the TV world.

"He goes up there in cowboy boots and a black T-shirt and pony tail," Fraser says. "Everyone else is in suits."

Znaimer doesn't worry much about paper-

work either.

"Moses never has polls, statistics or financials. His pitch is simply: I understand TV, give me a licence," Fraser says. "It's arrogant, cocky and presumptuous, and to some people it's vaguely off-putting, but the fact of the matter is that when he wins a licence, he launches a successful channel that delivers interesting content."

This cavalier attitude and renegade approach to broadcasting began to formulate during Znaimer's early days in Canada.

Born in Kulab, Tajikistan, Znaimer arrived in Montreal with his parents, Chaja and Aron, as post-war Jewish refugees in 1948. They moved into a third-floor walk-up on St. Urbain Street, the home where Znaimer bought his family's first television set with his bar mitzvah money.

"That was the moment. It was in my house and we weren't the richest people around," he says. "That was the big epiphany for me. I staggered up to my room, and I watched it propped up on my elbow on my bed. It was an overwhelming light bulb."

After earning a BA in philosophy and politics at McGill University and an MA in government at Harvard University, Znaimer moved to Toronto in the 1960s and became a radio and TV producer, director and host at the *CBC*.

After he left *CBC*, the late Phyllis Switzer recruited him, and with a team of like-minded entrepreneurs, they co-founded *Citytv* in 1972.

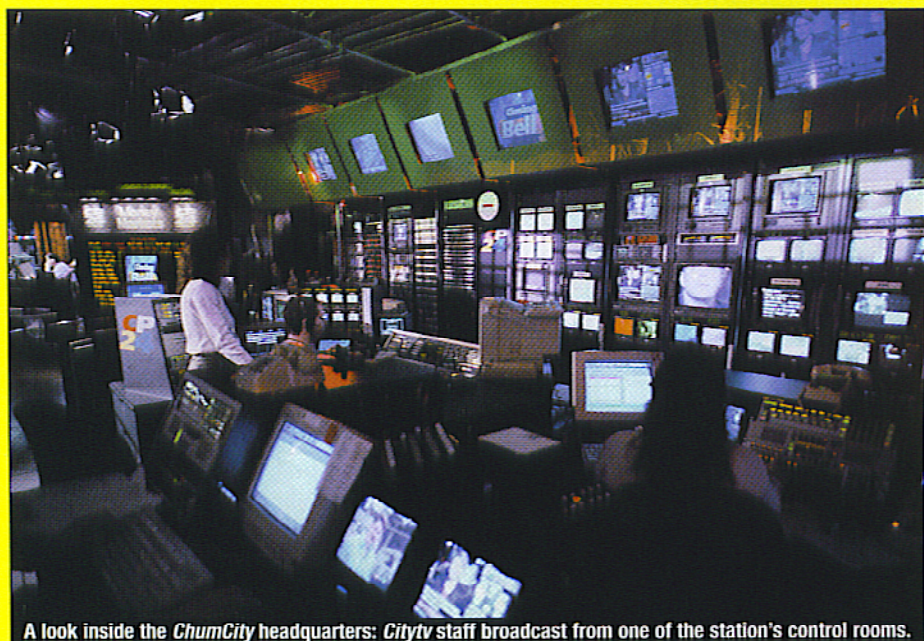
In *Citytv*'s quirkier early days, Znaimer set out to put on the air a diverse mix of people. This wasn't easy. His staff would come to him and say they couldn't find anyone with experience.

"I said, 'Well how are they going to get experience if we don't give them a job?'" Znaimer recalls. "I said, 'Go out on the sidewalk and grab the first person that walks by and we'll train them.'"

A shoestring budget and streetwise, raw talent meant that early programming was not particularly polished.

When it was suggested to TV anchor Gord Martineau that he join *Citytv*, he balked at the idea.

"I said no one in their right mind would go to *Citytv*. At the time, it was nuts," says Martineau, who was then working as a week-



A look inside the ChumCity headquarters: *Citytv* staff broadcast from one of the station's control rooms.