

# China limits foreign formats

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## Co-development deals set to increase as indies and distributors battle back against new rules

UK indies and distributors are developing strategies to keep doing business in China despite new regulations that will limit the number of international formats that can be remade there.

The government-controlled State Administration of Radio, Television and Film (SARFT) introduced the rules earlier this week to reduce the number of talent formats that Chinese broadcasters acquire.

The result is that domestic broadcasters will be allowed to acquire only one international format a year, while foreign formats will not be allowed to be broadcast in primetime.

“China was always looking for the next Susan Boyle and it’s become a bit much,” said Jean Dong, managing director of UK China broker Zespa Media, which brought Shine International’s *Clash Of The Choirs* to public broadcaster CCTV.

Paul Youngbluth is director at consultant Tape and works with many Chinese broadcasters to acquire international formats. He added: “This is certainly not a door closing on the formats business in China. It just means UK producers and distributors will take a slightly different path. The Chinese authorities just want to stop the Wild West trading of formats.”

British and European companies have been tapping into the lucrative Chinese market with some success in recent years. *The X Factor: Zhongguo Zui Qiang Yin*, which airs on Hunan TV, and *The Voice Of China*, on Zhejiang Satellite TV, have been ratings hits, while in recent months, UK formats including Studio Lambert’s *Undercover Boss*, *Supernanny*, *Secret Millionaire* and *The Nation’s Biggest* have all been snapped up by Chinese broadcasters.

China became the biggest growth market for UK programming last year, with revenues up 90% to £12m, according to Pact. Inevitably, British companies are working out how best to proceed. While talent contests are out, Chinese broadcasters are seeking family entertainment formats, cooking formats and studio-based quiz shows. Zig Zag Productions has pitched weight-loss format *Fit Family Challenge*, which tries to help three generations of a family to become slimmer, directly to CCTV.

Development producer Paul Hughes said: “It’s a format that’s strongly suited to China because it has a great social purpose.”

Sony’s Gogglebox Entertainment recently secured a remake of BBC2 quiz *Breakaway* on Zhejiang, which will be produced by Sony’s joint venture Chinese production company Huaso Film and TV Digital Production.

CCTV is also considering a local version of DRG-owned *Catchphrase*, *China’s Got Talent*: regulations have been introduced to limit the number of remakes of international formats after it was pitched at the Edinburgh International TV Festival. “Co-development is the best way to get formats away now that the government is clamping down, particularly bringing UK creativity directly to China,” said Dong. She added that it is currently pitching season in China and encouraged UK indies to get involved. “The broadcasters are hungry and now have to think harder about what shows to do,” she said.

Youngbluth said Chinese broadcasters will likely change their strategies because of the new regulations. Networks will get involved with international formats at the development stage and work directly with format creators and developers, rather than going through agents, he suggested.