

# MISSION UNSTOPPABLE:

## Engaging New Audiences & Shifting Culture Through Storytelling

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Culture changes over the long term. It rarely shifts due to one single factor. It is the result of many different stories, multiple touch points of consistent messaging, and community building. The *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* model was developed by Lyda Hill Philanthropies and [Hearst Media Production Group](#) (HMPG), a business unit of Hearst Television and independent producer and distributor of original programming for TV stations, broadcast and cable networks and streaming services. This successful impact and issue-based model can serve as a strategic blueprint for other philanthropic organizations looking to create systemic change by utilizing storytelling to drive culture change and augment existing programmatic grants.

*MISSION UNSTOPPABLE*, a live-action, half-hour television program hosted by Miranda Cosgrove, is a component of Lyda Hill Philanthropies' work to increase female representation in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) through an initiative known as [IF/THEN®](#), which works "to further advance women in STEM by empowering current innovators and inspiring the next generation of pioneers." Driven by a culture change framework, IF/THEN® proposes that "if you support a woman in STEM, then she can change the world." Transversely, if young girls see relatable women succeeding in STEM, then they will also be compelled to explore similar paths, thereby helping to close the gender gap in STEM fields.

This concept is supported in "Portray Her: Representation of Women STEM Characters in Media," a report conducted by Lyda Hill Philanthropies, in partnership with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. **The report underscores that representation in media (film and television) plays a "profound role" in how young girls think about their future career trajectories.** Parents and caregivers have a profound influence on their children and their children's media consumption, which is why parents/caregivers of teens are a secondary, yet critical, target audience for *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE*.

**MISSION  
UNSTOPPABLE**



Herpetologist Dr. Earyn McGee and *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* Correspondent Fig O'Reilly

Season 3 of **MISSION UNSTOPPABLE** premiered October 2021 on CBS weekend mornings **and reached millions of viewers nationwide**<sup>1</sup> during its first two 52-week seasons. Additionally, it has built a robust online presence, meeting its audience where they are on digital and social media platforms, and leveraging strategic partnerships with TikTok, Twitch, and Snapchat.

Developed by a majority female team (75% of the people working on the show are women including four-time Emmy®-nominated producer, showrunner Anna Wenger), **MISSION UNSTOPPABLE** has been nominated for two Daytime Emmy® Awards and has won 20 Telly Awards, 1 Parents' Choice Award, 2 Cynopsis Best of the Best Awards (Best Tween Series + Best Social Media Campaign), 1 Cynopsis Model D Award (Best Diversity and Inclusion Campaign), a 2020 Gracie Award and was featured on Entertainment Weekly's MUST List.

*MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* is rooted in "connected learning," a framework that utilizes the intersection of personal interests, peer support, and real world relevance to drive learning. Through a targeted approach that highlights the relevance of STEM in popular and personal interests of teenage girls, as well as demonstrating the strength of the female STEM community via mentors/role models, the series demonstrates to its audience of teens and parents of teens that STEM can unlock tangible opportunities and career paths for women.

**What makes the *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* model so unique and effective is its approach rooted in both narrative accretion and narrative transportation:**

### **Narrative Accretion**

Ongoing and continuous messaging touch points are essential to creating culture change. Over time, an individual's interactions with the narrative can accumulate and drive a mindset shift. Unlike films, *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* as a television series offers its audience consistent and dynamic messaging every week. This is further enhanced by the digital content messaging, as the target audience is approached via multiple touch points with coordinated messaging about women in STEM from a multitude of different verticals, at different times, throughout each day.

<sup>1</sup> Nielsen National TV View Sept 2019-Sept 2021

\* American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)

## MISSION UNSTOPPABLE:

- Reaches millions via weekly broadcast on CBS and across streaming platforms to build awareness and encourage the next generation of women in STEM
- Showcases relatable and inspirational women in STEM through engaging content to galvanize the next generation
- Consistently reaches teen girls by engaging them where they are across TikTok, Instagram, Twitch, and Snapchat
- Advances the message and deepens impact on national and local news with AAAS\* IF/THEN® Ambassadors in communities across the country

## Narrative Transportation

Narrative transportation proposes that audiences can be lost in a story well told and transported to experience the narrative of the characters they are empathetically connecting with on the screen. This transportation and connection can sometimes result in changing minds and changing behaviors. *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* is rooted in the "story well told" component through its development of high-quality and dynamic content that is thoughtfully geared towards its target audiences. By working with HMPG, a leader in educational and informational (E/I) programming, the model employed is one that understands its audiences and what they relate to. *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* utilizes role models (aligned with the IF/THEN® theory of change) to help girls not only understand who women in STEM are, but also relate to these women and be inspired to consider pursuing the careers they hold.

Over the past two seasons, *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* has had a profound impact on its target audience in the following ways:

### Changing Minds

*MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* is able to use entertainment media (specifically the television series and digital content) to reach a new, large audience and alter their understanding of who a woman in STEM is. *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* is not only able to successfully shift how women and girls see STEM professionals, it is also working to adjust how women and girls see themselves, and what careers are attainable to them. Anecdotal comments across the social community suggest a shift in perception with comments such as:

- "I'm not good at science, but it interests me and watching your video opened me up to maybe pursuing immunology."
- "This is SO cool!!! How does someone get this job?!!!"
- "I was good at chemistry and I LOVE makeup so maybe this is a career choice for me? I never even thought about [being] a cosmetic chemist."

In addition, data from ASI's Screen Engine research indicates a **20% increase in perception that STEM careers are "appealing" and a 19% increase that STEM careers are "creative."**<sup>2</sup>

After watching *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE*, Screen Engine/ASI's research found:

**+16%**

Increased Interest in taking STEM Courses in High School / University

**+17%**

Increased Interest in STEM among Girls

**+19%**

Lift in Perceptions of STEM Careers as "Creative"

**+20%**

Lift in Perceptions of STEM Careers as "Appealing"

<sup>2</sup> Screen Engine/ ASI Impact Study- Influence of Mission Unstoppable on STEM Perceptions, January 2019

### Changing Behaviors

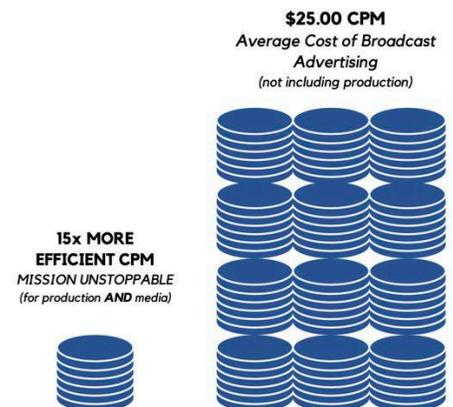
Through this coordinated approach of narrative accretion—ongoing and frequent messaging—*MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* is not only able to successfully adjust how women and girls see STEM professionals, it is activating girls to change their behavior.

**There has been a 17% increase in girls agreeing with the statement "I would like to have a career in a STEM field."**<sup>3</sup> *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* has also increased girls' likelihood to further educate themselves with research finding a **16% increase in girls saying they will take courses in high school and college to help them pursue a career in STEM.**<sup>4</sup>

### Building Communities

*MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* as an educational tool in classrooms across the country and around the world is deeply important. By embedding *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* into the IF/THEN® Collection and partnering with organizations like the National Girls Collaborative Project, NASA, Boeing, Apple, Cadillac and dozens more, the series is able to help build capacity among the movement working to drive more women into STEM roles by providing an important piece of content (broadcast weekly) to rally around. In addition, the *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* team has built a robust and engaged online community that is learning from one another, encouraging one another, and sharing the message of the importance of women and girls in STEM careers.

Given its strong return on investment—**generating a CPM (cost per thousand impressions) nearly 15x more efficient than Nielsen's industry (broadcast) average**—the *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE* culture change model is one that can and should be employed by other charitable organizations as they explore new approaches to achieve their organizational goals. Compelling mission-driven storytelling gives organizations a unique opportunity to go beyond existing programmatic work to shift the narrative and build connection, empathy, and understanding with their targeted community. It is a bold, but smart and practical, approach to change—and one that will likely emerge as a new normal for charitable organizations seeking to significantly advance systemic change.



<sup>3&4</sup> Screen Engine/ ASI Impact Study- Influence of Mission Unstoppable on STEM Perceptions, January 2019

You can access the *MISSION UNSTOPPABLE: Engaging New Audiences and Shifting Culture Through Storytelling* report and learn more about utilizing storytelling to augment your existing programmatic grants [here](#).