

Broadcasting Multichannel News + Cable

PRODUCER OF THE YEAR:
BUNIM/MURRAY'S JULIE PIZZI

●● Sports Executive of the Year ●●

ERIC SHANKS

Fox Sports chief's success with big events
shows there's still life left in linear television

●●●●

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130 West 42nd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036-8002

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR) www.futureplc.com



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Fox Sports CEO and executive producer Eric Shanks used a tried and true formula to succeed: Televising the biggest live events on broadcast TV and basic cable.
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30 SYNDICATION

Vol. 153 · No. 1 · February 2023. B&C Broadcasting & Cable (ISSN 1068-6827) (USPS 066-000) is published 6 times per year (Feb, March, April, June, Sept, Dec) by Future US, Inc., 130 West 42nd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Broadcasting & Cable PO Box 848 Lowell MA 01853. Printed in U.S.A. ©2023 Future US, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

FUTURE

Connectors
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Fishburne Animates Marvel Universe With Series on Disney Channel

Emmy, Tony Award-winning actor is executive producer for 'Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur'



By R. Thomas Umstead
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Veteran TV, film and stage actor Laurence Fishburne takes a seat in the producer's chair with the original animated series *Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, debuting on Disney Channel February 10.

The series, based on the Marvel Comics franchise of the same name, follows a gifted 13-year-old girl who doubles as a superhero protecting her New York City neighborhood with the help of a huge red dinosaur, according to Disney Channel.

The Emmy and Tony Award-winning Fishburne, who has appeared in such television shows as *Black-ish* and such films as *The Matrix*, *Tuskegee Airmen* and Marvel Studios' *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, is an executive producer for *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* along with Steve Loter. He also has a guest appearance in the show as the voice of the all-powerful character the Beyonder. Fishburne



Laurence Fishburne

discussed the series with B+C Multichannel News in an interview edited for space and clarity.

B+C: What drew you to the *Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* project?

Laurence Fishburne: [Series main character] Lunella Lafayette is the first teenage African-American superhero in the MCU, which is unique and special. It made people very excited, so we thought, 'Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work on the project.' It's one of the most fantastic animated experiences that has come along in a long time.

B+C: How important was it for you to be involved both behind the scenes as executive producer as well as on-screen as one of the characters in the series?

LF: I initially came on board as executive producer, and someone asked, would you think about doing a voice [for the series], so I said OK. [Laughs.] I've always loved animation and cartoons. [Looney Tunes voice actor] Mel Blanc is one of my heroes, and [Hanna-Barbera voice actor] Daws Butler was one of my heroes. They were great animated actors who worked in animation way back in the day. So the opportunity to perform one of the voices in this show was something I couldn't say no to.

B+C: The Marvel Universe has so many fans across multiple platforms. Do you think *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* can reach beyond the tween Disney Channel target audience and draw in Marvel fans?

LF: Like Lunella's family, our target audience is the entire family. Both [Steve Loter] and I are Marvel fans, so we have aimed to please our fellow fans as we've made this show. ●



Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur: Disney Channel; NAACP Image Awards: BET; African Queens: Netflix

BLACK HISTORY MONTH: WHAT TO WATCH

Networks and streaming services will mark Black History Month with the premieres of a slew of African-American-themed original series, movies, documentaries and specials. Here's a sampling:

February 1

The History of Africa (documentary series) Africa Channel

February 5

Under the Influence (movie) TV One

February 6

African Royale (series) Africa Channel

February 7

The Rising (sports series) Africa Channel

February 8

Bill Russell: Legend (sports documentary) Netflix

February 10

Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur (animation series) Disney Channel



African Queens

February 15

African Queens (documentary) Netflix

February 18

Black + Iconic (documentary series) BET

February 19

America in Black (news series) BET

February 22

Voices Rising: The Music of Wakanda (documentary) Disney Plus

February 25

54th NAACP Image Awards (special) BET



NAACP Image Awards

THE WATCHMAN

Senior content producer Michael Malone's look at the programming scene



By Michael Malone
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Gina Rodriguez Explores The Dying Business In a Dying Business on ABC

Not Dead Yet, about an obituary writer trying to sort out her life, premieres on ABC February 8. Gina Rodriguez plays the reporter. Broke and newly single, she goes back to the newspaper she'd departed years before. The only position she can land is writing obits.

The show is inspired by the book *Confessions of a Forty-Something F**k Up*, by Alexandra Potter. "I loved the title instantly," said Casey Johnson, who created *Not Dead Yet* with David Windsor. "And I really fell in love with the main character."

Windsor called the protagonist very relatable. "I really related to how she felt she was far behind and not living up to everyone's expectations," he said.

The show has a wrinkle that may call to mind *Ghosts*: Rodriguez's Nell takes on a different obituary each episode, and is visited by the ghost of that person, which only she can see. "We purposely have not watched *Ghosts*," Johnson said.

Johnson and Windsor both worked on *This Is Us*. That program was "a drama-heavy show with really good moments of comedy," said Windsor. "We thought, maybe we could bring some of that dramatic element into this comedy we're making."

Johnson said the cast, which includes Hannah Simone as Sam, "can do the really hard funny, and can also do really heartfelt moments."

Windsor noted an episode that sees Nell and Sam break down why Nell's engagement fell through. "You don't get big, emotional scenes



Not Dead Yet

like this in broadcast comedies all that often," he said.

Corralling Critters To Yield Titters on Fox

Animal Control, a Joel McHale comedy, starts on Fox February 16. The series follows a group of *Animal Control* workers. McHale plays Frank, a former cop who tried to expose corruption on the job, and ended up getting fired.

"He's brilliant at dealing with animals," executive producer Bob Fisher said. "Not so much other humans."

McHale's comedy credits include *Community* and *The Great Indoors*. Fisher called him "hilarious," and said he brings "a lot of humanity" to the Frank role. "There's a lot of feeling underneath the guy," he said.

Animal Control is a workplace comedy. Fisher listed *The Office*, *Parks and Recreation* and *Taxi* as influences.

The animals the folks chase down include dogs and cats, of course, and some other species. Those include a python, cougar, weasel, and "some killer rabbits who got into some recreational drugs," Fisher said. There's also a bear in a hot tub and a cow in a fraternity house.

What stands out about *Animal Control*? A top-notch ensemble cast, Fisher said, including Vella Lovell and Ravi Patel. Lots of physical comedy. And the critters.

"Emotional stories involving animals," Fisher added. ●



Animal Control

WATCH THIS ...



At Midnight

At Midnight, a rom-com starring Diego Boneta and Monica Barbaro, debuts on Paramount Plus February 10. Jonah Feingold directs the movie, about an ambitious hotel manager in Mexico and a movie star in Hollywood, and how they come together. ■ On Netflix, part three of *The Upshaws* begins February 16. Mike Epps plays the father, Kim Fields the mother, and Wanda Sykes the difficult sister-in-law. ■ On February 17, *Hello Tomorrow!* premieres on Apple TV



The Upshaws

Plus. Billy Crudup plays an ace salesman in the show, about a group of traveling salesmen selling lunar timeshares. ■ On BYUtv, *Making Good* starts season five February 19. Host Kirby Heyborne volunteers with organizations he may not be all that suited to help. Also on February 19, *The Company You Keep* begins on ABC. A night of passion goes down between con man Charlie and undercover CIA officer Emma. Milo Ventimiglia portrays Charlie and Catherine Haena Kim plays Emma.



The Company You Keep

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Multichannel News

WONDER WOMEN

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The annual Wonder Women luncheon has become a highlight in the calendar for those who are passionate about empowering and championing extraordinary women in the industry.

Why attend? This is an unforgettable afternoon for everyone in the media and entertainment industry. As well as celebrations and inspirational speeches, this is an unrivaled opportunity to network with industry leaders and make powerful connections.

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ERIC SHANKS, FOX SPORTS FIND SUCCESS WITH A TIME-TESTED PLAYBOOK

Putting the biggest live events on the big broadcast platform is the Sports Executive of the Year's winning strategy



By R. Thomas Umstead
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In the aftermath of Lionel Messi and Argentina's thrilling FIFA World Cup win over France this past December — ending arguably the greatest tournament in the history of the sport — no one would have begrudged Fox Sports from taking its own victory lap. Fox Sports's successful coverage of the international soccer tournament wrapped up one of the most successful performances in the 28-year history of the organization.

In a year in which live sports programming firmly secured its position as the foundation for the struggling linear television universe, Fox Sports was the category's North Star, led by its CEO and executive producer Eric Shanks. In 2022, the company's live sports programming — which ranged from the World Cup and Major League Baseball's World Series to *Big Noon Saturday* college football games, Fox NFL *Sunday* "America's

Game of the Week" coverage and NASCAR races — aggregated an industry-high 265.3 billion minutes of live event consumption this year. It's the fourth straight year Fox Sports has led all sports distributors in minutes viewed while continuing to embrace the traditional TV bundle for distribution of the majority of its marquee events.

"The thing that's worked very well for Fox Sports and for Fox is their increased emphasis on broadcast," TV sports consultant Lee Berke said. "They've placed most of their major events on broadcast, buttressed by [cable networks] FS1 and FS2. Sports is a growing percentage of primetime programming on broadcast in general and Fox early on has taken a leadership position on that."

Fox Sports programming was so prevalent on the Fox network, particularly in the fall, that more than 90% of all the broadcaster's viewing from Labor Day to New Year's Eve was attributed to sports. The remarkable amount of consumption was bolstered by Fox Sports's World Cup coverage. The morning and afternoon telecasts — which aired in November and December, instead

of the typical summer, due to host country Qatar's desert heat — averaged 3.6 million viewers across Fox and FS1, up 30% over Fox's 2018 World Cup coverage from Russia.

Shanks, the former DirecTV programming executive who joined Fox Sports as CEO in 2010, continued to fortify the division's portfolio in 2022 by reaching long-term TV rights deals with several important properties. Under Shanks's tutelage, Fox Sports worked alongside the Big Ten college conference to negotiate a new, seven-year rights deal with Fox, NBC and CBS worth a reported \$7 billion.

Fox Sports in October renewed its Big 12 TV rights as part of a reported \$2-billion deal that also includes ESPN and keeps the conference on Fox through the 2030 season. Fox also renewed Major League Soccer in a four-year deal, shutting out ESPN and ABC, which had aired MLS games since the U.S. league's inception in 1996.

Fox Sports also forged a league of its own with the April 2022 launch of the United States Football League (USFL), the spring league it owns and manages.

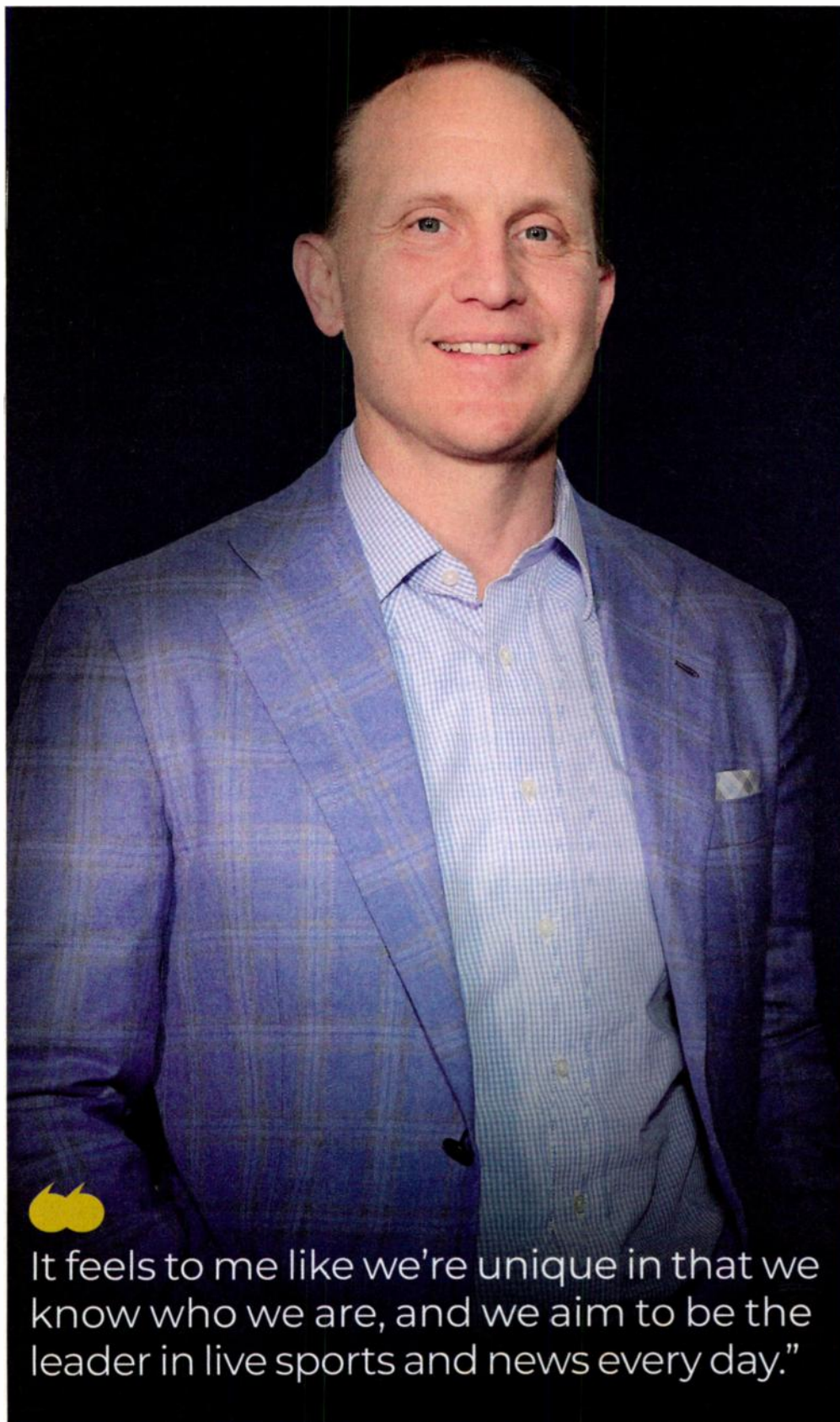
Industry executives said Shanks's ability to build strong relationships with content partners has helped Fox Sports lock down most of its high-profile sports properties through the latter part of the decade.

'A Moving Force'

"Eric is a moving force," MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said. "He's always coming to us with ideas about things that we might consider rather than him just being receptive to ideas that we have. That's what makes for a good partnership."

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell commended Shanks for being a key member of the team that has helped foster the three-decade relationship between Fox and the league. "Quite simply, Eric has made the NFL better," he said. "He's been an incredible partner who's never afraid to challenge us, which is something I really appreciate."

Under Shanks, Fox Sports has also helped evolve the way viewers watch live sports content through technological innovations that have added to the enjoyment of fans rooting for their favorite teams. Whether it's aerial drone usage and virtual production technology in its NASCAR productions to the introduction of a helmet cam for its USFL telecasts, sports executives said the company's on-air



It feels to me like we're unique in that we know who we are, and we aim to be the leader in live sports and news every day."

technical innovations are second to none.

"Working with Eric Shanks and Fox Sports has been nothing short of phenomenal," NASCAR president Steve Phelps said. "We love how Fox Sports is willing to push the envelope from a technology and production perspective when it comes to covering NASCAR."

Not one to rest on laurels, Fox Sports in 2023 will air a second season of the USFL, new baseball and NASCAR campaigns and the FIFA Women's World Cup. First up this month is Super Bowl LVII, the network's first telecast of the Big Game since the pre-pandemic 2020 contest.

"Eric thrives in constantly innovating while consistently executing at the highest levels," News Corp. executive chairman and CEO Lachlan Murdoch said. "From launching the new USFL this past spring to the epic fall calendar consisting of the best coverage of college and NFL football, the World Series, World Cup and preparing for the Super Bowl, Eric and his team have performed masterfully in bringing our audience the best in sports."

Fox Sports on-air veteran Kevin Burkhardt will call his first Super Bowl after succeeding the ESPN-bound Joe Buck as Fox's top NFL play-by-play announcer. Burkhardt said the Fox culture under Shanks's direction is to remain aggressive and innovative in its approach to working marquee events.

"We go after things that we want and get big properties and hire good people to work on those properties," he said. "It's a message and attitude of being loose, having fun and embracing being on the big stage."

Shanks, who is the B+C Multichannel News Sports Executive of the Year for 2023, spoke about Fox Sports's phenomenal 2022 performance and discussed the future of the sports TV in a wide-ranging interview, presented here with edits for clarity and space.

B+C: Put Fox Sports's 2022 campaign into perspective. Did it meet your expectations?

Eric Shanks: Clearly, we couldn't have predicted such an unprecedented year. When we set our budget in 2021, we couldn't have predicted that we were going to have probably the greatest sporting event of all time in the World Cup final. The performance of everything that we've put on the network just validated the strategy that Lachlan Murdoch and [Fox chairman] Rupert Murdoch put in place,

which is to be very focused on being the leader in live television, whether it's sports or news. It feels to me like we're unique in that there's no doubt that we know who we are, and we aim to be the leader in live sports and news every day. By any metric, whether it's total consumption or whether it's the individual performance of our events or our leagues, that's the case. And in the areas where we're not quite No. 1, I mean, that's the challenge that we have going forward.

B+C: You mentioned the World Cup. Fox Sports had some daunting challenges going into the tournament, including an unprecedented fall start plus unfriendly time differences with Qatar. How was Fox Sports able to overcome those challenges?

ES: It really is all about planning. We were in Qatar two and a half years before the World Cup to start setting all of the pieces in place for the planning. So when that month [of the tournament] comes on the air, it's the result of this amazing team that we have here to put a plan in place and to execute it. Of course, we can't predict that an event will unfurl where the biggest stars in the sport actually show up and are the key components of the event at the end. So that's what kind of paid off: the planning was there and then the stars showed up.

B+C: Fox Sports continues to offer all of its marquee sports events, whether it's all 64 World Cup games, the Super Bowl, or even USFL games, on linear television. In a TV environment when more content distributors are moving to streaming, why is Fox Sports so invested in the traditional television platform?

ES: I actually look at it a little bit differently. If you look at the big rights deals that have been done, there might be media companies that are trying to move things into their streaming services. But if you look at what the professional leagues are doing, the NFL deal had clear priority on broadcast. There are more games on broadcast now for the NFL than ever before. If you look at the Big Ten deal, it's a move away from cable to three broadcast entities. You look at the MLS deal that we just did. While they did a streaming deal [with Apple TV Plus], they really wanted to have games on broadcast every week. The biggest events from the biggest leagues are still on broadcast television. So our focus is there



The biggest events from the biggest leagues are still on broadcast television. ... We know that being a leader in news and sports is the driver of value in the bundle."

because we know that being a leader in news and sports is the driver of value in the bundle.

B+C: So what is Fox Sports's streaming strategy going forward?

ES: A big chunk of our consumption comes from streaming — it's just not direct-to-consumer streaming. We still have great products and availability for people to watch on any device, anytime. So we're not against streaming; we just aren't in the business model of direct-to-consumer. For the World Cup, we did a unique deal with Twitter, where we showed the first few minutes of every game live, which set social records for us. We used [Fox Corp.-owned streaming service] Tubi for highlights and on-demand replays which help set streaming records. When the games ended there

was a message to go to the Fox Sports App, so the conversion of those fans was tremendous for us.

B+C: Having said that, could we see a Fox Sports direct-to-consumer streaming service in the next five years?

ES: We have the rights and the flexibility if we ever wanted to jump in and go DTC. Whether it's the NFL or Major League Baseball, we have the same rights as everybody, so it's our choice what to do with them. We can look at our crystal ball and know some of the things that will happen in five years. We know in five years that Fox's [NFL] 'America's Game of the Week' is still going to be the No. 1 one show on television. We're still going to have the NFC package and the Super Bowl. We're still going to have the World Series. Those are the core properties that drive our business. There are a lot of things outside of our strategy that can't be predicted, such as how many streamers will be around in five years and how many direct-to-consumer offerings there will be in five years. There are things that we have already solidified while letting others help us make future decisions without us having to make the investments.

B+C: In an era where sports rights are seemingly moving from network to network or to streaming services, Fox Sports last year was able to secure TV rights to such marquee properties as the Big 12, Big Ten and Major League Soccer. How have you been so



Fox Sports's successful coverage of the FIFA World Cup from Qatar — won by Argentina's Lionel Messi on penalty kicks — was the result of two-plus years of planning.

FOX SPORTS PROUDLY CONGRATULATES

ERIC SHANKS

CEO AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



2023 SPORTS EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

BROADCASTING + CABLE MULTICHANNEL NEWS





Fox Sports's long-term partnership with Major League Baseball includes the sport's biggest events, including the 2022 World Series.

successful in securing rights deals in such a competitive marketplace?

ES: From a non-business standpoint, we pride ourselves on being a good partner in terms of promoting, cross-promoting and producing content. If you look at our core rights for football, including the NFL, Big Ten, USFL, Pac-12, and also the core rights of NASCAR, Major League Baseball and FIFA international soccer, we really focus on promoting them on-air and being good partners which drives value for us and for them. Our core partners are not commodities; they're not interchangeable. So I think we're good partners and because we have identified our core rights, we know that they're a part of our value equation. I also think one of our success stories was getting more upstream in the rights process, whether by starting our own league or acting as a true partner to the Big Ten as a media rights consultant and playing that role that we did with securing the rights. That's another thing that we feel sets us apart this year, other than our distribution strategy.

B+C: Do you see a more competitive marketplace over the next few years as Google, Apple, Amazon and other digital/streaming companies negotiate for sports rights?

ES: Every time you think that it's going to be less competitive, it's always more competitive and a

competitive marketplace doesn't drive prices or costs down. That's a good thing: You want your partners to be successful if they're driving value for you. Just like earlier when we talked about our crystal ball, I don't know in five years if there's going to be more people bidding for rights or less, but I think they're in that mode right now. You have companies that aren't in the sports business now looking to be in the sports business. We've always been used to competition, but this is the first time that we've competed against \$2 trillion companies that aren't even in our business for rights. So it's yet to be seen in this competitive environment what will be a success for them and whether they'll keep going or revert back to their traditional business.

For us, we're in the sports business. It's existential to us. To our newest competitors, it's not existential; it's kind of a toe dip in the water to see where it goes. That's why I'm not sure if there will be more competition or less. History says there's never less. Even with that, they really can't impact our business in the next six years because we've wrapped up about 80% of our core rights deals, and I think we're in a really good position to renew those other contracts like NASCAR when it comes up. So at least from our

position, the window for them to really impact us has closed.

B+C: One way to protect rights fees is to create your own league, which Fox Sports did with the USFL last April. Given spring football's failed history, what made you confident that you could pull this off?

ES: Well, it was a big jump into the deep end, and I credit my bosses here who believed in the vision. We were born to do football and we believe that in America there is demand out there for more high-quality football across more parts of the year, and we knew that we could make the media part of it a success. In year one, it performed as well as any longstanding sports event in that second and early third quarter. We have a long-term plan for growth. We took our media expertise and put a group together that actually was able to do the football operations, health and safety protocols for the players, ticket sales and marketing for the whole league. We even sold rights to another media partner at NBC. One of the most unique things we did in 2022 was having a media company actually run a league. The crowning of a champion, for the first time since the '80s, of a spring football league was definitely a unique moment for Fox Sports.

B+C: Fox Sports is televising Super Bowl LVII. The last time Fox had the big game was in February 2020, just a month before the pandemic. Are you approaching post-pandemic Super Bowl coverage differently than in 2020?

ES: The other thing that was interesting for our last Super Bowl was that it was the NFL's 100th anniversary, so the content, pregame and everything that the NFL wanted to accomplish along with us was totally different than this year's event. That being said, every year the network is really responsible for making the Super Bowl bigger than the one before, so we work hand in hand with the NFL on what moments to discuss, what we want America to remember from the event and making the event as big as possible.



NFL football – including the bulk of NFC playoff games – is the cornerstone of Fox Sports's properties.

B+C: Will we see any new technological innovations during the game?

ES: We're trying to do some things to get fans closer to the game, whether it's with audio or new cameras. We usually end up doing some really interesting things from a graphics perspective or data perspective. I think this year, obviously, the thing that's on top of everybody's mind is the continued improvement of Damar Hamlin, so we'll be figuring out how we could celebrate his recovery or improvement. Whatever that ends up being is going to be a great moment.

B+C: Fox Sports has been aggressive in creating content around sports wagering. Do you believe that such content will inevitably have a major influence on the overall sports television marketplace?

MS: I think we were really aggressive moving into the wagering space, not just as a vehicle for advertising or taking advertising dollars. I'm pretty sure we're the only media company that has an investment in horse racing wagering, with our 40% ownership in [the New York Racing Association]. We have Fox Bet, and we have our 18.66% [purchase] option in FanDuel. We're in poker and iGaming and we're the leading free-to-play app. We're the only media company that is really invested from an ownership standpoint. So yes, wagering is having an impact and will have an even bigger impact as more states roll out [legalized sports betting].

I would say that specific wagering-only content is probably less important because that's speaking to a niche of a niche. Rather, what's happening is, in every NFL pregame show and college pregame show, someone is talking about odds, spreads, odds to win a championship or even prop bets. It really has become integrated into the mainstream. I think that's the biggest impact — everybody feels more free to talk about and use wagering in an event. People now understand odds, so I think those things have the biggest impact today, but we haven't been able to figure out yet whether wagering is having an impact on viewership.

I think that the amount of sports on television clearly impacts wagering, because the more sports that you have and the bigger that you make those events, the more [bets] there are. But we don't really see any evidence yet of wagers impacting viewership.



It used to be that the holidays were not a great time to put sports on television, but now it's the best time.

B+C: In 2019 Fox Sports exited the regional sports business. Given the recent upheaval and evolution within the category, do you see any value in potentially getting back into the regional sports business?

ES: I think there's a lot of forces that will cause it to evolve, whether it's a new business model for consumers, whether it's technology, whether it's owners and leagues having an expectation of economics that they eventually use to pay players and to put a product on the field. So there's no question that it's going to evolve.

I feel like it will create opportunities for us at Fox, because I'm not sure that the ... volume of games will still be played on what we consider to be an RSN. There still may be some, but there may also be the ability to put more games on broadcast television that used to be on an RSN. Look at what [Los Angeles Clippers owner] Steve Ballmer did

out here with the Clippers — he just took more games off of his RSN to put them on a broadcast platform. When you're in 210 markets around the country with a broadcast station, that gives you the opportunity to do a few local over-the-air pro game telecasts and take advantage of our structure, our broadcast nature and our broadcast reach. That might be the evolution of some of that RSN product.

B+C: What's on your wish list for Fox Sports in 2023?

ES: As we look at 2023, we have another really unique event in the Women's World Cup, which is something that we've been planning for for years. It's an event where you really root for the U.S. women's national team to bring home another World Cup. It's exciting for us to be able to serve as the flagbearer for women's sports in this country at the highest level. I don't think there's anybody that invests more in the success of women's sports. Also for us, it's the beginning of the new NFL contract next year, so working with the NFL on some of the new rules around scheduling and what games we get.

I also want to continue to be the leader in holiday sports fare. It used to be that the holidays were not a great time to put sports on television, but now it's the best time. Owning Thanksgiving, Christmas, and being around with sports content on New Year's and Thanksgiving Friday and Saturday is really exciting for us, and that's only really come around in the last three years for the most part. ●



Fox Sports's coverage of NASCAR events like the 2022 Daytona 500 has provided opportunities for technical advancement, such as the use of drones or virtual production technology.

TRAVELING THE ROAD FROM SUPERFAN TO TOP PRODUCER

Bunim/Murray president Julie Pizzi is thriving atop the production shop where her prolific career began



By R. Thomas Umstead
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When Lizzo, host of Lizzo's *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*, accepted her surprise

Emmy Award in the best competition program category this past September, she said that the heartwarming stories of the plus-sized dancers in her show were not that unique, they just needed a platform on which to be showcased.

For nearly 40 years, Bunim/Murray Productions has successfully provided a platform for a myriad of unique, sometimes unorthodox but always authentic and true voices, including the performers on Lizzo's *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*, which it produced for Amazon Prime Video.

On stage with Lizzo when she accepted the Emmy was Bunim/Murray president Julie Pizzi, who is leading the production company known for such hit reality shows as *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, *Bad Girls Club*, *I Am Cait* and *Born This Way* in this new and evolving world of TV production. The Emmy win for Lizzo's *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls* is the latest milestone for the veteran producer, who began her career at Bunim/Murray under founders Jonathan Murray and the late Mary-Ellis Bunim nearly two decades ago on MTV competition show *The Challenge*.

"Talk about someone who could handle the pressure — it was clear to me that the crew had a lot of faith in her and she had faith in the crew," Murray said



of Pizzi. "That's one of the things that makes a great producer. I'm so proud of her, and I know that Mary-Ellis Bunim would be so thrilled to see a woman leading this company."

Since taking the reins in 2021, Pizzi — who left BMP in 2004 to start her own production company, P&J Television, before returning in 2016 — has overseen the development of hit shows including Lizzo's, BET dating series *After Happily Ever After* and recently announced Paramount Plus series *The Family Stallone*, while continuing to roll out new seasons of reality hits such as USA's WWE-themed *Miz & Mrs.* and the third part of the Emmy-nominated, culturally-defining docu-

Amazon Prime Video and Bunim/Murray won an Emmy for the Julie Pizzi-produced Lizzo's *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*.

series *Surviving R. Kelly*, which aired in January. Pizzi has also reached into alternative media with Facebook Watch shows *The Sway Life* and *House of Creators*.

Pizzi helped breathe new life into two classic Bunim/Murray-produced MTV staple reality series, MTV's *The Real World* and *The Challenge*. *The Real World*, which launched on MTV in 1992 and is considered a reality TV pioneer, has expanded under Pizzi with two "Homecoming" reunion editions, bringing back early stars from the show for a second go at the format.

The Challenge — which Pizzi first worked on as a showrunner in the late 1990s — was renewed this past June

for a remarkable 38th and 39th season. Pizzi has also successfully expanded the franchise to broadcast television in 2022 with CBS's *The Challenge: USA* spinoff and to streaming with Paramount Plus's original series *The Challenge: All-Stars*.

"She understands what goes into making really great content, but what sets her apart is her ability to modernize the approach for what this era calls for," MTV Entertainment Group, Paramount Media Networks and MTV Entertainment Studios executive VP and head of global production Keri Flint said. "She continually improves on the shows that are already amazing as she looks for ways to elevate our partnership."

Industry executives said Pizzi's ability to understand all facets of the business has endeared her to show crews and to distributors. "The experience that Julie has both as a producer and an executive makes her the ideal leader for Bunim/Murray," Drew Tappan, OWN TV head of unscripted development, programming and specials, said. BMP produces the network's reality series *Family or Fiancé*, which recently completed its third season.

Pizzi's ability to build on the legacy of Banijay Entertainment-owned Bunim/Murray legacy while laying the groundwork for a new path forward across multiple distribution platforms has earned her the B+C Multichannel News Producer of the Year nod for 2023. In an interview, she spoke about the company's long-running programming success, its current and future business prospects as well as the overall television marketplace. Here's a version of that conversation edited for space and clarity.

B+C: You were a producer for Bunim/Murray in the 1990s and then left to start your own company, only to return and eventually become president of the company. What is it about Bunim/Murray that keeps you coming back?

JP: I simply adore this



Above, BET dating reality show *After Happily Ever After*. **Below,** Bunim/Murray president Julie Pizzi, the B+C Multichannel News Producer of the Year.

company. Everything I learned about unscripted and how to make what is considered a reality show I learned from Bunim/Murray, and I actually learned from Mary-Ellis Bunim and John Murray. When I started my career here, I was a superfan of *Road Rules* [the BMP/MTV sister show to *The Real World*] and what they were doing in the genre, and getting into this company was really difficult. It was like getting into Harvard: when you showed up here, you were exhaustively interviewed. You had to do research before you came in and write mission packets and submit writing samples. It was really the only company doing this, and for me, everything I learned here, I just always had such admiration for the company. Then working here in my early 20s was the best time of my life. I literally started traveling right out of the gate. I was doing *Road Rules* and *The Challenge*, and there were so many young people that were really trying to play in this space and create what the genre was. So it was a really exciting time.

B+C: You mentioned working on shows like *Road Rules* and *The Challenge*. Why do you have such an affinity and drive for the production side of the business?

JP: I feel like

unscripted allows creators to be really close to the fire. You come up with ideas, you talk to executives, you sell the ideas, and then you come up with these outrageous, crazy things that you could do, especially with some of the genres that Bunim/Murray does here, like *The Challenge* and *Road Rules*. Then to actually make them happen and to be the person doing that was really invigorating. It moves really fast and creators really do get to create and see the end product. I don't think you can say with a lot of entertainment jobs.

B+C: The list of successful reality shows that Bunim/Murray has created over the years is impressive. You chose to continue building on two shows from the company's past — *The Real World* and *The Challenge* — from MTV. Why do you feel those two shows can transcend generations and still be relevant today?

JP: I think the core of both of those shows are human stories and they're very much like a soap opera. If you look at the history, particularly of *The Challenge* and how we bring back cast members year after year, you see their lives go through ups and downs and victories and losses. *Real World* was meant to be an unscripted soap opera, and *The Challenge* really picked that up and ran with it. Last year, MTV came to us and said we really want to do reunions, and I think



everyone always loves ‘where are they now?’ But to also know these characters so intimately and to have shared 20-plus episodes with them some 20 years ago, there’s something really impactful about that. It’s not only feeling like you know them, but really seeing people’s stories play out in a way that you not only can relate to, but that also may be aspirational as well.

B+C: Is it fair to call those shows genre-defining? Put into perspective the influence *The Real World* and *The Challenge* have had on the reality genre.

JP: I think they are sort of the nucleus and sort of where everything started. If you look at competition formats that are successful, a lot of them borrow from each other. If you look at some of those early shows like *The Challenge*, *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, they all have their own unique DNA, but they’ve also borrowed from each other. But when you really get down to it, it’s really these regular people with cameras put on their lives, and what happens when everyone stops being polite and starts getting real. And whether that’s on *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, *The Challenge* or *Real World*, at the end of the day, why people are viewing these types of shows is to see that character development.

B+C: Is it easier now to develop, produce and get a reality show distributed, with all of these new outlets, than it was 20 years ago?

JP: It’s so hard to say because the business has changed so much. Technology has advanced so much, so that’s helped us get programs moving faster, but to actually get a show from an idea onto a screen can have so many steps now. I mean, the development process can take years. We just finished producing a show that took two years to get on the air. It’s a fantastic product, but sometimes it just takes that long for the actual green light. Sometimes you have a casting step, you have a further develop-



Above, host T.J. Lavin and contestants on MTV's *The Challenge*. Below, documentary film *Dead Hot: Season of the Witch* stars Vanessa Hudgens and GG Magree.

ment step and then you have to get certain deals done. And by the time that all happens, it can be a year and a half.

B+C: Are you finding that the streaming services are moving more toward reality content, and are you reaching out to them more than cable or broadcast networks for distribution of your shows?

JP: When we create a project, we don’t create for linear or [digital] platforms, we literally just create an idea and then we pitch everybody equally. What we do find is that we get offers from both cable and platforms on the same project. It really doesn’t change the ideas, but I will say that I do believe that all the stream-

ers are interested in unscripted programming. They’ve seen a lot of success in it in the last 18 months, and I think there are some shows that have really cut through. There definitely seems to be a need and certainly an appetite for it.

B+C: One of those shows that has cut through is *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*, which of course won the Emmy. When you were initially producing that program, did you expect it would be so successful?

JP: There’s a couple of unique things about that project. The whole show was her idea, and we were brought in after she had already sold it to Amazon. You can look at it as a dance competition show, but it wasn’t that she wanted to do a reality show. She literally wanted to find dancers that looked like her, so there was a real intention behind it. It wasn’t like, ‘I want to make a reality show to be more popular, or to just do reality.’ It was more like, ‘This is a service that I need and this is a great way to get there.’ The second piece of it is that we knew she was going to be on camera. That was always the agreement, but the level in which she showed up on camera and the vulnerability and the honesty that she showed was, I think, unparalleled. I think audiences felt like they got to know her better. She was intimately involved with the dancers and what they were doing. She really cared about them, and you just don’t





Congratulations Julie Pizzi

President, Bunim/Murray Productions

Producer of the Year



Banijay
Americas

always see that. I think that magic really came from her and what she really gave to the project, and I really think it translated on-screen.

B+C: You mentioned the importance and draw of Lizzo to the success of that show, and Bunim/Murray has been successful in building other shows around such celebrities as the Kardashians and Lindsay Lohan. But then you look at the success of shows that don't have celebrities, like *The Real World*. What exactly makes for a successful reality show — is it celebrity star power or is it a compelling story about the lives of everyday people?

JP: I think it is always helpful to have a big name. It does draw viewers and that certainly helps for promotion and marketing. But the core of all of these shows are the regular people that are extraordinary and that we care about as humans. I will say that about the dancers that participated in the Lizzo show — they were amazing women that you just fell in love with. Bunim/Murray's casting department is by far the best I've ever seen at finding people to be open enough and raw enough to tell their stories and to be vulnerable. The truth is a lot of the people that are on these shows have never been trained and never been in front of a camera before. For them to really give of themselves is asking a lot, so I really do think the success of this genre is always the casting.



Above, WWE star The Miz and family are in focus on USA Network's *Miz & Mrs. Below*, *The Challenge: All Stars* on Paramount Plus showcases past participants from the MTV series.

B+C: Jonathan Murray told me that Mary-Ellis Bunim would be thrilled to see a woman leading this company. Put into perspective what it means for you to serve as president of Bunim/Murray.

JP: It means a lot to me. Mary-Ellis and John mean a lot to me. I will say that it is such an honor to be in these shoes. I think one of the things that was really important to me is to make sure that Bunim/Murray is still a really fun place to play. It's like a big family. There are people that have been here for decades and people just know each other. They've been there when they started their careers, when they got married, when they had babies — we've sort of been together for a really long time as a community, and, honestly, the community of Bunim/Murray really expands the walls of the company. There are so many incredibly talented producers in our business that came from here, or worked here and really left an impact. So I really wanted to continue that sentiment of this

family business culture at Bunim/Murray, that Mary-Ellis and John had set up years ago — that magic feeling of working in an environment with people that are creative, excited and passionate about making unscripted television.

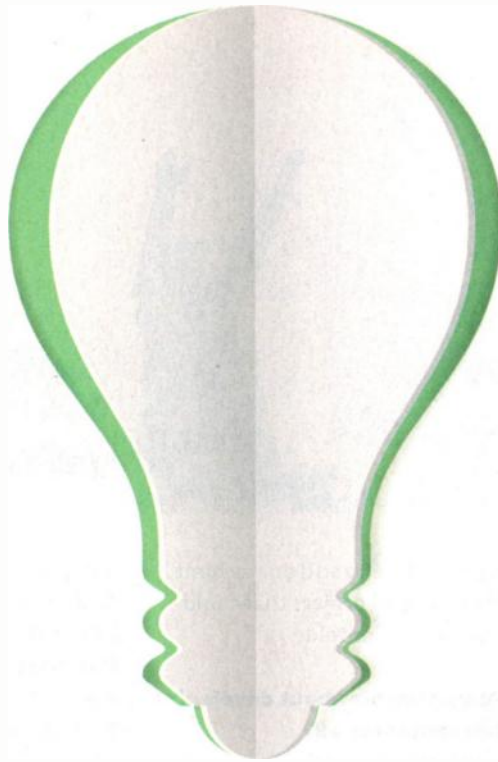
B+C: Where do you want to take the company in 2023 and beyond?

JP: I think one of the biggest things that we have been working on as a team here is expanding what we do. We've been through a lot of changes in the last four years — we've had a lot of franchise series that have ended or that have gone to different producers or different platforms — so it has created an opportunity for us to expand on who we are. I wouldn't say reinvent ourselves, because we're very comfortable being Bunim/Murray, but as the market continues to change and appetites evolve [show] that we're really capable of producing anything. We really wanted to make sure that our pipeline of development reflected that. We were putting out shows that maybe Bunim/Murray is not known for, but we wanted to show the audience and the buyers that we could do them, and we really succeeded at that this year. We want to continue to grow and take some risks since we still have a lot of franchise series and we have incredible relationships with our partners. They've been really fun, and I think the creative process has always been so honored here that we try to step in some directions that might make us uncomfortable and just kind of see what happens. And so far that's really worked out.

B+C: Are there any genres that you have not jumped into that you would like to explore at some point?

JP: This summer we produced a 90-minute documentary film called [Dead Hot: Season of the Witch] with Vanessa Hudgens and GG Magree. We had initially pitched it as a series and we





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had done a presentation, and then we really pivoted and were like, let's just produce this. I'm not kidding with you — we grabbed like every employee at this company and said, 'OK, we're going to just make this show.' We all went to Salem, Massachusetts, and shot this spiritual journey for these two women who are like two best friends through the lens of the supernatural world. It ended up being just so good. We paid for it and then sold it after. It was so fun because we could do whatever we wanted. Often, you go out on a show and you have real marching orders of where the project needs to go. But with *Dead Hot*, we went out with an intention, but then we really let the journey take itself and we ended up with a very different product, and that was really exciting.

B+C: Is there anything that you haven't done in your career that you would want to explore going forward?

JP: I would love to do a real long-form documentary. We've done quite a few here at Bunim/Murray, but something that we could shoot over the course of a year. We have schedules and budgets, so it's really hard to tell a story that has to really unfold over a long period of time. I think that that would be really rewarding. I do think there's a few spaces that we've been



looking in, but we're still on the hunt for a really special project that could take a moment to unfold.

B+C: Any thoughts about developing scripted content at all?

JP: I look at it like this: I've been doing unscripted for decades, and Bunim/Murray is so well-known for unscripted. Unless it really made sense, meaning it was like a scripted show about an unscripted world, I don't think so. There's so many people that are so excellent at that, that I feel like, why compete when there's already people that do that so well?

B+C: How do you see the overall television business evolving over the next year?

Above, The Challenge USA extended the franchise to CBS. Below, The Real World revisited its second season with The Real World Homecoming: Los Angeles on Paramount Plus.

JP: Budgets are going to get smaller, but I think orders can get bigger, so there's ways around that. I don't know if as many shows are going to get picked up next year, but I think that we're all hoping for it. One of the things I will say is that unscripted generally is less expensive than scripted, so the hope is that there's always room for it. We've seen so much change this year, and I feel like things are sort of leveling out and there are all these new opportunities popping up. Hopefully unscripted will find its footing, but I think there's always a concern that there are so many ideas that you really hope that yours can move forward.

B+C: So does that affect the amount of content you'll be looking to develop in 2023?

JP: It never affects how much we develop. We have actually doubled down on our dev team this year and hired five new people. Our pipeline is robust and we're constantly developing shows and pitching shows that we think are good ideas. It's stuff that we believe in, but we're literally volleying, and somebody still has to pick up the ball on the other side. We'll still continue to create as much development to get out to the buyers, but it's really whether or not they have the budgets and the marketing money and the space to launch new shows. ●



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Execs Who Show Expertise In Reaching Black Viewers

Meet three TV veterans developing authentic, compelling shows for an audience that's eager to stream



By R. Thomas Umstead
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Black viewers are streaming video and informational programming in unprecedented numbers, and a group of savvy TV veterans is leading the industry in

striving to meet those consumers where they are looking for content.

African-American audiences spend a majority of their viewing time watching streaming services — and 62% of those viewers say streaming is the most relevant platform for stories depicting Black life and culture, according to a recent Nielsen Diverse Intelli-

gence Series report. The three dynamic and uncompromising executives profiled here are dedicated to making sure quality scripted and reality series — as well as news and informational content — are available to a Black audience with a voracious appetite for authentic, nuanced programming featuring their stories and images.

BRETT DISMUKE, GENERAL MANAGER, ALLBLK AND WE TV

AMC Networks veteran programming executive Brett Dismuke has his hands full programming across multiple platforms as general manager of both cable network WE tv and streaming service ALLBLK.

Driving Dismuke's efforts is an ultimate goal of providing quality, entertaining and relevant programming to Black viewers, especially on streaming via ALLBLK. "Many people in my generation grew up with the images we were allowed to have and see," he said. "Now that we are in a position to control said images, I'm taking on the responsibility of guiding that ship."

Dismuke oversaw the 2020 rebranding of the streaming service Urban Movie Channel — formerly owned by BET founder Robert Johnson — to ALLBLK and has created a service that features original scripted and reality series, as well as short films targeted to Black viewers. In particular, scripted series such as comedy *Partners in Rhyme*, starring iconic hip hop artist MC Lyte, as well as drama series *A House Divided* (which last month launched its fifth season) and *Double Cross*, have helped Dis-



Partners in Rhyme

muke grow subscribers and audiences for the service over consecutive quarters, according to AMC.

"Our goal is to make ALLBLK the No. 1 service in the world for Black stories and storytellers, and Brett Dismuke is a leader who is up for that ambitious objective," AMC Networks president of entertainment and AMC Studios Dan McDermott said. "He expertly continues to not only develop unique, gripping content for ALLBLK — super-serving the audience — but also finds opportunity and success in the targeted alignments of WE tv and ALLBLK with incredible proficiency. Both platforms continue to grow under his skillful leadership."

For Dismuke, the ability to

draw from popular reality content from WE tv such as series *Love After Lockup*, as well as offer original scripted comedy series like *Millennials* and dramas like *Monogamy*, gives ALLBLK a large library of diverse content that explores all aspects of the Black experience.

"I want people to view ALLBLK as a trailblazer in the fairness of equal representation," he said. "Nothing in life is 100% good, and sharing the depictions of Black and Brown narratives should be no different. I want ALLBLK to be considered a truth teller and an equal sharer of our stories."

The entrepreneurial producer and executive, who ran his own company, So Chi Entertainment, and also served as CEO of independent urban production company The Swirl Group prior to joining AMC Networks, said it is critical that Black consumers have viewing options across all platforms.

"Access to a reflection of one's self can make or break how one views themselves," he said. "It is great that some mainstream services and networks offer a small section of Black content, but it is a complete game-changer to have services dedicated to highlighting the vast array of our stories." ●



DEVIN GRIFFIN EXECUTIVE VP AND GM, BET PLUS

BET's efforts to expand its iconic linear cable brand to streaming with the launch of BET Plus in 2019 paid off handsomely in 2022 with Emmy Award nominations for signature comedy series *The Ms. Pat Show* and drama series *The Porter*.

Leading BET Plus's charge to reach Black viewers on streaming is Devin Griffin, who has overseen operations for the service since its launch. Under Griffin's tutelage, the service offers more than 2,000 hours of content, including a bevy of original series from such diverse producers as Tyler Perry, Kenya Barris, Lee Daniels, Pat Williams, Kirk Franklin and other leading Black content creators.

"BET Plus puts us in a position to speak to the diversity of perspectives and interests that are within the Black community and those that love Black programming and stories," Griffin said.

"We believe that our edge is that we can tell stories from a place that is unique, but is broadly appealing and relatable."

BET Plus has developed popular series including Tyler Perry's *Bruh*, *All The Queen's Men*, Tyler Perry's *Ruthless*, *The Family Business*, *Kingdom Business* and *First Wives Club* — as well as series launching in 2023 including *Average Joe* starring Dion Cole. In 2022 the service struck gold with Emmy nominations for *The Porter*, which earned an Outstanding Choreography for a Scripted Program nod for its portrayal of Black Pullman workers in the aftermath of World War I, and original comedy *The Ms. Pat Show*, which garnered a nomination for Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series. The series follows the exploits of a convicted felon turned suburban wife, mother and comedian.

The Ms. Pat Show star J. Bernard Calloway said the show's Emmy nomination is verification of the quality of content



that BET Plus is producing under Griffin's leadership.

"It's great to be part of a project that has made history for [BET Plus]," he said. "The nomination is basically the respect of our peers and the recognition of how great the show is."

Griffin said that recognition is helping to build greater awareness for BET Plus and confirms its strategic business plan is headed in the right direction.

"One of the big driving forces for me is being able to contribute to expanding the ways Black stories and experiences get portrayed," he said. "With BET Plus, we've been able to expand the canvas that we're able to paint on." ●

GERALDINE MORIBA VP OF NEWS, ENTERTAINMENT AND EMPOWERMENT, THEGRIO

Emmy- and Peabody Award-winning producer, journalist and Stanford University Brown Institute research scientist Geraldine Moriba is successfully mixing the Allen Media Group-owned theGrio's originally-produced news and information programming across multiple distribution platforms to create a successful media formula targeting a Black audience.

To complement theGrio's signature news and entertainment website and basic cable network theGrio.tv, Moriba in 2022 launched theGrio streaming network and mobile app dedicated to programming about and featuring unique Black voices. She also launched theGrio Black Podcast Network, offering more than five weekly podcasts on political, social and entertainment issues affecting Black culture.

"Geraldine continues to pave the way

in delivering high-quality, African-American-focused content," AMG founder, chairman and CEO Byron Allen said.

Extending theGrio's reach beyond media, Moriba — who prior to joining theGrio in 2021 produced documentary series for PBS such as *Sinking Cities* and *Chasing the Dream* through production company, Moriba Media — also developed and oversaw theGrio Awards, celebrating excellence in entertainment and social justice. The inaugural event aired in November on CBS and Paramount Plus.

Moriba wants to position theGrio as a global brand that serves Black consumers with quality, informative programming wherever they are consuming content.

"Right now, theGrio is the largest Black newsroom in the nation, and our reporting is unapologetic," she said. "When you couple that with the entertainment and lifestyle value, it makes us very successful at targeting a diverse multimedia audience."

Allen Media Group's purchase of Black News Channel assets this past July bolstered what already was arguably one of the leading Black-oriented news and entertainment websites. Moriba has already integrated former Black News Channel on-air personalities Marc Lamont Hill and Ebony K. Williams into its news and informational strategy by creating daily news shows for both that will run across theGrio's multiplatform offerings.

Moriba's ultimate goal is to ensure Black issues and stories are heard across all platforms, she said.

"Without doubt, Black people are central to the fabric of American culture, and there are not enough platforms telling our stories," she said. "Our mission is to build a portfolio of a broad representation of Black people across the spectrum. We are trying to get people of globally varied backgrounds, gender identification, ages and sexual orientations, with the driver being Black culture to help us move forward faster and stronger." ●



'Magnum P.I.,' Left for Dead, Is Reborn on NBC

Hawaii-based drama has same DNA, but season five offers a few wrinkles



By Michael Malone
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Nine months after *Magnum P.I.* got a surprising cancellation, the Hawaiian crime drama debuts on a new network February 19.

Magnum, with Jay Hernandez in the private eye role, was canceled by CBS last May, and promptly scooped up by NBC. It is rare that a show changes networks, and the *Magnum* brain trust is confident the shift is a favorable one.

Showrunner Eric Guggenheim was in a Zoom meeting with writers and producers, hashing out season five, when he got the call that the show was canceled. "It was incredibly disappointing," he told B+C. "We thought it had a really strong season creatively, and the numbers were good. I was really optimistic. In retrospect, maybe I shouldn't have been."

The malaise did not last. NBC reached out within 24 hours, Guggenheim said, and the deal to carry on was finalized around six weeks later.

"Everyone was a little surprised based on how popular the show was," Lisa Katz, president, scripted entertainment programming, NBCU Television and Streaming, said of the cancellation. "Once we realized there was an opportunity, we jumped in."

The new *Magnum P.I.*'s season five will have 20 episodes. The show lost a few crew members and writers after the cancellation, but the entire cast returns.

CBS Studios produces the show in association with Universal Television. Katz said *Magnum* works for NBC because it is

"super-entertaining, high-quality, with a great cast and great cast chemistry," along with "a fantastic setting."

NBC is hopeful sun-splashed Hawaii will play well across the freezing American winter. "Who doesn't want to be stuck inside, watching beautiful people in a beautiful setting, having a great time?" said Katz.

She said "the DNA of the show" will remain. Guggenheim agreed, but suggested a few pivots. *Magnum* will be "a bit more serialized," he said, while teasing what "is probably the most emotional season yet, heavier on humor and romance."

Gettin' Miggy

Indeed, a season-five trailer shows *Magnum* and Higgins, portrayed by Perdita Weeks, in the shower together, sparking hashtag #Miggy on social media.

Guggenheim said at the Television Critics Association Winter Press Tour of the budding romance: "The chemistry between these two actors is just amazing, and it was becoming harder and harder, honestly, to keep them apart."

Hernandez and Weeks said the new romance won't change the dynamic between *Magnum* and Higgins all that much. "We still bicker constantly," he said at the TCA session. "We still bicker a lot," she added.

Guggenheim also hinted at a season-long mystery dating back to *Magnum*, T.C. and

Jay Hernandez (l.) and Perdita Weeks are back as *Magnum P.I.* makes its move from CBS to NBC.

Rick's soldier days ("an old mission that puts them all in peril") and an episode inspired by the 1963 noir film *Shock Corridor* that sees Higgins go undercover in a psychiatric hospital. Hernandez directs the latter episode.

NBC will air four episodes on premiere day — two season-four repeats and the first two episodes of season five. February 13 starts "Magnum Week," which includes the pilot on NBC that night and eight episodes on USA Network February 18.

Katz is hopeful the promotions will both bring former CBS viewers to NBC, and turn new viewers on to the show. "We'll take everyone we can get," she said.

Changing Channels

It is a short list of series that have switched networks. In 2018, Fox cancelled *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* after five seasons. NBC ran seasons six, seven and eight of the cop comedy.

"We're in some great company, actually," Guggenheim commented.

Among other shows that found new homes after cancellation, last month Starz picked up *Minx* after the comedy did its rookie season on HBO Max. *The Mindy Project* went from Fox to Hulu, *Designated Survivor* from ABC to Netflix and *One Day at a Time* from Netflix to Pop TV.

Magnum will be on NBC in the 9 p.m. Sunday slot, with *The Blacklist* starting a new season February 26, in the 10 p.m. space.

"While it's true that their primary goal is generating episodes they can sell into [syndication] aftermarkets, and that linear ratings won't make or break the show, the scheduling suggests they hope to build *Magnum P.I.*'s audience as part of their lineup," Old Dominion University associate professor of communications Myles McNutt said.

Guggenheim and the writers are just happy to still be working on *Magnum P.I.* "There are moments where we say, wow, are we really doing this? Did we really cheat death?" he said.

"We were dead and we came back to life." ●



ARRIVALS

Hulu Series Revisits 'History'

Celebs line up for sequel to classic Mel Brooks film

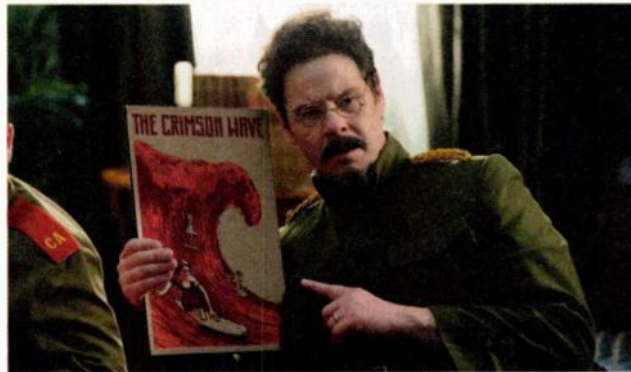


By Michael Malone
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History of the World, Part II, the long, long, long-awaited sequel to Mel Brooks's beloved movie, premieres on Hulu March 6. There are eight episodes detailing, as the title indicates, world history.

Brooks, who is 96, is a writer and executive producer on the series along with Nick Kroll, Wanda Sykes, Ike Barinholtz and David Stassen. The first four are in the cast, along with a long list of notable actors, including Quinta Brunson, Pamela Adlon, Danny DeVito, David Duchovny, Johnny Knoxville, Kumail Nanjiani, Seth Rogen and Sarah Silverman.

Brooks's films include *Blazing*



Saddles, Young Frankenstein and *Spaceballs*. At the Television Critics Association Winter Press Tour last month, Kroll was asked how Brooks's humor would hold up in 2023.

"Mel's ultimate goal was always to poke fun at those in power and how greedy and stupid they were," Kroll responded. "And so doing a show about history, now at a time when we are

Ike Barinholtz as Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky in *History of the World, Part II* on Hulu.

reexamining how things went down, it became for me a very easy through line to just continue Mel's legacy of poking fun at those in power. And that really became our guiding light to continue making the show."

Kroll insisted there's still a place for racy humor, as long as it's done right. "I personally think right now in comedy you can still say and do insane things," he said. "You just have to be a little more thoughtful about how and why you're saying them."

Kroll also spoke of the challenge of finding roles for the many, many comic actors who expressed interest in working on the show. He shared about casting Rasputin, "who everybody tried to kill a million times," and mentioned how Johnny Knoxville texted as soon as the project was announced. "Who else would be better to play Rasputin than Johnny Knoxville?" Kroll said.

Knoxville wasn't the only one to reach out when *History of the World, Part II* was announced. "It begins with Mel, people being excited about this, people being excited to work with Mel Brooks in any way they can," Kroll said. ●

DEPARTURES

'SNOWFALL' PRODUCERS AND CAST PLOT A MEMORABLE DISMOUNT

THE SIXTH AND final season of drama *Snowfall* premieres February 22 on FX, with two episodes on that night. The show has chronicled how an off-the-books CIA operation contributed to the destruction that crack brought on South Central L.A. in the '80s.

In the final season, civil war threatens to destroy the Saint family.

Damson Idris, Angela Lewis, Michael Hyatt, Carter Hudson and Amin Joseph star.

John Singleton and Eric Amodio created the show with Dave Andron. Singleton died in 2019. Showrunner Andron spoke at the TCA Winter Press Tour last month about honoring Singleton with a strong landing for *Snowfall*. "This is all his legacy," he said. "This is the story. He started his career telling about South Central, about his neighborhood. If



anything, I guess we just felt maybe a little added pressure to make sure we brought it home and landed the plane the right way."

Executive producer Walter Mosley spoke about the different communities the show spotlights, including Hispanic, Black and white ones, and how they came together, for better or for worse, over the course of the show's life. He also spoke about how the characters grew. "They started off young, inexperienced, or coming from a different experience, and they had to

go through this kind of terror road of crack dealing and racism and come out the other end," he said. "This is not a happy ending kind of thing."

Idris plays Franklin Saint, and is a producer on the show. He spoke about his own growth, and the growth of his character. "To see Franklin Saint go from boy to man and to see myself go from boy to man, and my art and the way I interact with the world — being more confident, being more of a leader and leaning into that — I think that's one of the biggest comparisons I have with Franklin," Idris said. "I think that is his evolution. We've watched a kid turn into a man and the rocky road that that was for him." — MM

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AMC NETWORKS

KWTV News 9 anchors Karl Torp and Amanda Taylor check in with chief meteorologist David Payne. More than most markets, weather drives ratings in Oklahoma City.



Winter in Oklahoma City Means Ice, Wind ... and Thunder

Weather drives ratings in increasingly lively state capital



By Michael Malone
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Weather is always a major story in Oklahoma City, whether it's tornadoes, ice or the "Siberian bomb cyclone," as one general manager put it, that rolled in just before Christmas. That meant snow and ice, brutal winds and extreme cold.

The Oklahoma City stations were all over it. When the extreme weather turns up, "it's showtime for our meteorologists," said

Rob Krier, president of Griffin Media, which owns KWTV.

Griffin holds KWTV, a CBS affiliate and a ratings beast, and MyNetworkTV station KSBI. Nexstar Media Group has NBC outlet KFOR and independent KAUT. Hearst Television owns ABC affiliate KOCO. Sinclair Broadcast Group has KOKH-KOCB, a Fox-The CW pair.

Cox Communications is the primary cable operator in DMA No. 46.

Oklahoma City is the state capital. The market's economy was long driven by energy, defense and agriculture but it has diversified, including a growing biotech sector. "Oklahoma City has been able to grow its economy past agriculture and oil and defense," Brent Hensley,

KOCO president and general manager, said.

Oklahoma City offers an array of entertainment options, including theater, live music, a bunch of upscale restaurants and breweries and Oklahoma City Thunder NBA basketball.

"A lot of people think of Oklahoma as a flyover state, but there's a little bit of something for everyone," KWTV VP of marketing Houston Hunt said. "You're going to find what you're looking for in Oklahoma City, and you're not gonna pay through the nose for it."

KWTV devours ratings points. In 2022, the station, known as News 9, won the 6 a.m. battle, in households and viewers 25-54, handily. KWTV won 5 and 6 p.m. in both races, and tallied a 6.5 household score at 10 p.m., ahead

of KFOR's 3.7, KOCO's 3.1 and KOKH's 0.6. In the 25-54 derby for late news, KWTV had a 1.9, KOCO a 0.9, KFOR a 0.8 and KOKH a 0.3.

KWTV thrives on local ownership, well established on-air talent, and a trusted weather team. "We hang our hat on weather," Krier said. "We probably have the largest weather center in the country."

KWTV Heads Downtown

KWTV moved into a new downtown facility in November, departing the northeast side of the city, where the other stations are located, and where KWTV spent close to seven decades. The new site is a couple blocks from City Hall, and one block from the convention center. "It's a completely different vibe," said Krier, noting how, among other advantages, employees can walk down the street for dozens of restaurant options.

Griffin donated the old KWTV building to Langston University, an HBCU that will use it for its aspiring journalists.

Griffin owns six stations in Oklahoma, including KOTV Tulsa. "The Griffins continue to be incredibly invested in Oklahoma," said Krier.

KWTV's rivals are hustling to pick up ratings points. KOCO debuted a 4 p.m. newscast in August, replacing *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. Zach Rael and Abigail Ogle anchor. The Ogle name is extraordinarily represented in Oklahoma City TV (see sidebar).

"It has done really well," Hensley said of the newscast.

Hensley is bullish on Hearst Television's Very Local app, which sees the group's stations share content nationwide. "It's catching on," he said. "We're really encouraged by it."

KOCO has five meteorologists, with Damon Lane the chief.

KFOR's Sunday morning public-affairs program *Flashpoint* is approaching 30 years on the air. Kevin Ogle hosts, with Michael Turpen representing Democrats and Todd Lamb speaking out for Republicans. Turpen ran for governor in 1986 while Lamb ran for the same post in 2018. Wes Milbourn, KFOR-KAUT VP and general manager, quipped that "you have to run for a major office and lose before becoming co-host."

Milbourn boasts of talent with deep roots in the market at Oklahoma's News 4, including Ogle and chief meteorologist Mike Morgan,

both with three decades at the station. "They are friends to viewers as they welcome our talent into their homes every night," Milbourn said.

The Nexstar stations produce 54½ hours of news a week. On KAUT, known as Freedom 43, *Rise and Shine* is on from 7-9 a.m. "It tries to be a little more entertaining in that particular hour of the day," Milbourn said.

KAUT has 9 p.m. weekday news too.

Diana Wilkin took over as VP and general manager of KOKH-KOCB in late July. Unlike the other Oklahoma City stations, the pair does not have a helicopter. Wilkin said she's revamping programming and making some management changes. "There's an opportunity to position ourselves in a stronger way in the market," she said.

Jack Gerfen joined as Fox 25 chief meteorologist in August. Shelby Love departed the station last summer when she married, and returned to the anchor desk, hosting mornings, in January. "She brings a renewed energy to our mornings," Wilkin said.

KOCB has high school football on Fridays in the fall, when *Friday Night Rivals* airs. Wilkin called it "a great community service project."

She mentioned Sinclair's "digital-first" approach, and said it is paying off in Oklahoma City.

Solid Returns in a Growing City

The market's newly diverse economy is holding up well. The city continues to grow, and the stations are seeing solid returns. "We saw nice momentum from local advertisers in the market through 2022 and despite all the talk of recession, the advertisers I talk to are optimistic about what 2023 holds," Hensley said.

Hensley has been the KOCO GM since 1999. The city has "changed immensely" during his time in Oklahoma City, he said. "In my young adult life, downtown Oklahoma City was not someplace you frequented," he added. "Now it's a vibrant downtown. There are things to do, places to live, restaurants and activities that were not available before."

Local TV insiders mentioned vigorous news players in the market. "I'll put my newscast — any of the market's newscasts — up against the major market newscasts," Milbourn said. "We can compete with the larger markets in terms of quality of news and quality of anchors." ●

ANCHORING IN OKLAHOMA CITY RUNS IN THE FAMILY

ABIGAIL OGLE CO-ANCHORS the 4 p.m. KOCO news that launched in August, while also anchoring at 6 and 10 p.m. Helming the news in Oklahoma City is a family tradition for the Ogles. Abigail's grandfather, Jack, anchored at KOCO, and her father, Kevin, is on at KFOR. Uncle Kent and sister Katelyn are at KFOR too, and her uncle Kelly used to anchor at KWTV.

Abigail loves working in her home market. "My second grade teacher watches every night, my grandparents watch every night," Ogle said. "I'm serving these people who helped shape me."

She called it a "blessing" to work in Oklahoma City. "People I've known for decades, I'm informing them about COVID or severe weather," she said. "These can be life-changing stories."

Growing up, she recalls dinner table conversations about current events and politics. She frequently visited KFOR with her father. "I was kind of a station rat," Ogle said. "How everything came together, how the news got from the station to your living room, I thought it was fascinating."

Abigail Ogle is proud to say her name each day on the news. "It represents the decades of commitment that have come before me," she said. "It represents dedication and fairness and accuracy. I am a journalist first and foremost, but I am also an Ogle journalist and I want to make that name proud." — MM

KOCO anchor
Abigail Ogle



Smaller Audiences Force New Ideas in Syndication

Renewals come fast and furious in January



By Paige Albiniak
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The instability of the overall syndication firmament is resulting in stability in other areas, such as locking shows and talent into longer-term renewals.

The practice is nothing new in syndication, with established hits like Oprah, Ellen and others routinely having scored long-term deals. But the new reality of relatively low ratings for all launches — major new talkers Debmar-Mercury's Sherri and Warner Bros.' Jennifer Hudson are both averaging between a 0.6 and 0.7 household rating, according to Nielsen, thus far — has made multiyear deals rare for newer shows and almost nonexistent for rookies.

In January, which used to be the month when the NATPE convention was held and thus when deals were closed and announcements made, syndicators announced several renewals and long-term deals, with several more pending.

The biggest of these, by far, was the five-year deal that the ABC Owned Stations gave to Sony Pictures Television's long-running game juggernauts *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune*. With that renewal came a license fee that used to be more de rigueur but now is almost unheard of: Disney is paying upwards of \$1.6 million per week to carry both shows across its owned station group, according to several industry sources. And that's only for the ABC-owned stations that carry the show — that doesn't include the fees stations across the rest

of the country will pony up for the pair.

Wheel and *Jeopardy!* were able to command such numbers and such a long-term renewal for several reasons. First, *Jeopardy!* is frequently the most-watched entertainment series on television — including anything on primetime. *Wheel*, which is paired with *Jeopardy!* in access time periods on ABC-owned stations in top markets, is never far behind. In the week ended January 22, *Jeopardy!* scored a 5.9 live-plus-same-day household rating and 7.3 million viewers, according to Nielsen, followed by *Wheel of Fortune* at a 5.6 and 6.9 million viewers. And unlike competitor Debmar-Mercury-distributed *Family Feud*, which runs many times a day on both broadcast and cable, the two games turn in those ratings on the strength of their single runs.

Wheel of Fortune and *Jeopardy!* also were the beneficiaries of something else that used to be common in syndication but that now almost never happens: a bidding war.

Big Four In the Bidding

The station groups of all the Big Four networks initially bid for the two games, although news-heavy NBC reportedly dropped out early. ABC, CBS and Fox stayed in the mix with Fox asking for a six-year deal, rather than five, in order to cover three political cycles. *Wheel* and *Jeopardy!*'s older, well-heeled audiences are catnip to political ad buyers who come out in force every other year, another factor driving up their collective price tag.

In the end, ABC prevailed,

Disney paid some \$1.6 million per week for five more years of game-show juggernauts *Wheel of Fortune* (pictured) and *Jeopardy!* on ABC-owned stations.

with sources saying that the deal was so important to The Walt Disney Co. that the details traveled all the way up to newly returned CEO Bob Iger.

Wheel and *Jeopardy!* aren't the only shows to have been renewed in the past few weeks. Debmar-Mercury has been quietly renewing *Family Feud*, starring Steve Harvey, in three-year deals, with half the country starting their new deals this fall and the other half the following fall.

"*Feud* has been renewed through 2025-26 in most of the major markets on Fox, CBS and Nexstar stations," said Ira Bernstein, co-president of Debmar-Mercury. "We're getting to play market by market, which in this day and age [of group renewals] has become a huge advantage to us."

Fox Television Stations picked up Sherri, Debmar-Mercury's new talker starring Sherri Shepherd, for two more years, as did Cox Media Group, Nexstar Media Group, Sinclair Broadcast Group and Tegna. Fox also renewed Warner Bros.' *Jennifer Hudson* for another season.

"Stability helps both you and the production entity," Frank Cicha, executive VP, programming, Fox Television Stations, said.

"The scary thing was always the multiple-year deal at the outset."

Sherri had the advantage of putting an experienced host in Shepherd — who starred on ABC's *The View* from 2007 to 2014 — into the chair of a popular host in Wendy Williams. Although Sherri just premiered in September, it has the feel of a more veteran show because Shepherd guest-hosted Wendy Williams



many times in the 2021-22 TV season when Williams was unavailable for medical reasons. Sherri also retained much of Wendy Williams's crew and personnel after that show was canceled.

"We want that show to continue and get broader," Bernstein said about Sherri. "We think it's a solid single to left field and we'd like to grow it 10%, 20%, 30% over the next few years. These things take a long time."

Similarly, Jennifer Hudson is produced largely by Ellen DeGeneres's executive producers and crew and on Ellen's set, but Hudson herself is a new face in syndication.

"There are four financial drivers in this business: cash, barter, controlling your costs or repurposing your product in other places," David Decker, newly appointed president of content sales at Warner Bros. Discovery, said. "You also have to be really cost-conscious. We did a really good job with that. We were able to launch the show on the Ellen infrastructure and we didn't have to build a set or a control room. Our start-up costs weren't what a new talk show usually is."

Decker and Warner Bros. are also happy to be in business with a talent like Hudson. "I've been on the road with her and she is the real deal; she's a very special talent," Decker said. "She's an EGOT [Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony winner] who is genuine and who likes to listen to people."

Also renewed last month was this year's new game show, *Pictionary*, starring Jerry O'Connell, which Fox produced and distributed in a first-ever partnership with CBS Media Ventures after a summer test-run in 2021. Fox renewed Fox First Run-produced *You Bet Your Life* with Jay Leno for season three and *25 Words or Less*, starring and executive produced by Meredith Vieira, for season five. Back in September, Fox also gave two-year deals to TMZ and TMZ Live, both of which are now produced in-house after Fox acquired TMZ in September 2021.

Rounding out the rookie-class



Above, Craig Ferguson will return to TV next fall with clip show *Channel Surf*. Below, Drew Barrymore was renewed with a new, two-half-hour format.

renewals, NBCUniversal is expected to pick up *Karamo*, starring Karamo Brown, for a second season. That means that everything that was introduced this year will see a season two.

Some Vets Return

Among the veterans, CBS signed Drew Barrymore, now in a half-hour format, up for another year and Hearst gave both weekly political show *Matter of Fact* with Soledad O'Brien and distributor Sony Pictures Television two more years. *Matter of Fact*, which is produced by Hearst, has been on the air for eight seasons.

"I am hopeful the rest of the country will follow suit with Hearst," said Zack Hernandez, senior VP, general sales manager, Sony Pictures Television. "The show fills a need in the marketplace, which is a weekend news adjacency."

What all of these renewals mean is that there's not much space for new product, but there are still some new shows circulating.

Sony Pictures Television in mid-January



surprised the market by introducing a new half-hour clips show, *Channel Surf* with Craig Ferguson. *Channel Surf* will be produced in England by Sony-owned production studio Whisper North, helping to keep costs down. It's being shopped for a cash license fee plus a 5.5 national/2.5 local barter split.

While some observers noted that it seems a bit late to bring a new show to market, especially considering that all of this year's newcomers are being renewed, Hernandez said, "I think good shows find their way. My rule is to never assume and people will make room if it's good enough."

Ferguson, who hosted CBS's *The Late, Late Show* from 2005 to 2014, knows syndication, having starred in Debmarmercury's *Celebrity Name Game* from 2014-16. He also shopped an access (pre-primetime) or late-night talk vehicle that never sold. The arrival of *Channel Surf* to the marketplace is also interesting because with the end of *Dr. Oz* and *The Good Dish*, whether Sony was going to continue to produce first-run series for syndication seemed in question, but Hernandez shot down that notion.

"I've never been part of a studio that is more aligned from domestic to international, distribution to production," Hernandez said of Sony. "*Channel Surf* is the first of what I hope are many new first-run offerings in the coming years."

Besides *Channel Surf*, other new offerings for fall 2023 include talk show *Michaela* from PPI Releasing, starring former *Good Day LA* and HLN anchor Michaela Pereira; a court show starring Eboni K. Williams from Allen Media Group and off-GSN *People Puzzler* starring Leah Remini from Debmarmercury.

Off-network, Carsey-Werner is expected to bring out ABC's *Roseanne* spinoff *The Conners*, now in its fourth season on the network.

With 2023 looking like a slow year in terms of new offerings, 2024 brings the prospect of more open time slots and thus more opportunity. ●

Vin Di Bona's Funny Content Stays Valuable in Streaming Era

Producer sells company, but will keep working on 'America's Funniest Home Videos'



By Jon Lafayette
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Long before there was YouTube or TikTok, Vin Di Bona, creator of America's Funniest Home Videos, built a business on user-generated content. Now in the streaming era, America's Funniest Home Videos (abbreviated as AFV) is still going strong on ABC after 33 years on broadcast.

"You can go on YouTube, you can go on TikTok, you can go on any platform you want and occasionally, you get something that 's funny or amazing," Di Bona told B+C Multichannel News. "But our show's curated and everything on the show is funny or amazing."

The curation is crucial. Add in writing that is contrapuntal to the video, stating something funny to go along with the funny scenes you're seeing. Present with appealing hosts. "That is the simplicity of the formula," he said. "It's not complicated. Basically we got people falling down, but it's how you do that."

In January, Di Bona sold his companies, Vin Di Bona Productions and Fish-Bowl Worldwide Media, to an investor group led by Clarion Capital Partners.

"We are excited to partner with Vin and his team," David Ragins, a managing director at Clarion, said. "Vin is a true visionary who has built a legendary television and digital production company that has been a leader for decades. At Clarion we have built a thematic focus on video content that is effective in multiple channels including traditional TV, CTV and digital. Investing in Vin's company is our first step in

building a new leading platform in an industry known for its innovation and creativity."

Di Bona is not disclosing the purchase price. But at age 78, he has agreed to stay on for at least five more years as executive producer of AFV. "I've been doing this for 55 years; I love doing it," he said. "I'm not going to stop."

Di Bona has accumulated a library of 2 million clips. Another 5,000 clips come in every week. Recently, doorbell cameras have proved a boon of new material for the show. "It seems people don't realize that when it rains overnight, the stairs are going to be icy," he said.

Tapping Into New Tech

Di Bona's company is taking advantage of technology to monetize its library in new ways.

The main show, AFV, streams on Disney Plus, where it is one of the top 10 shows. Di Bona also puts together video packages that appear on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat. Each platform requires a different approach, with longer packages on YouTube and shorter ones on Instagram and TikTok.

"We are now getting into FAST [free ad-supported streaming TV] channels," he said. "It gets down to one word, content. And if I were to make it two words, I would say funny content. If you have funny content you have a shot at any new format or way to watch because ultimately, people want to laugh."

The company has grown its digital media staff from three people 10 years

Vin Di Bona's creation, America's Funniest Home Videos, is still going strong after 33 years.



ago to 30 people just in social media today.

AFV still derives the bulk of its revenue from network license fees, but digital revenue adds up. "Let me put it this way, we do OK," Di Bona said.

Di Bona has been doing OK in the TV business for more than half a century. He originally got interested in television when he visited stations as a teen pop singer in the early '60s. He got a bachelor's degree in TV and radio from Emerson College and a master's in documentary film from UCLA. Di Bona got a job at WBZ Boston, a powerhouse station that would preempt NBC programming once a month to show a documentary that he would produce, followed by a live talk show discussing it.

He headed to the West Coast, interviewed for jobs for nine months before getting a job at CBS directing and producing documentaries that won Emmy and Peabody Awards.

He produced *Battle of the Network Stars* and *Entertainment Tonight*; he likes to note that he hired Mary Hart, who became the long-running host of *ET*. Later, fraternity brother Henry Winkler — yes, the Fonz — brought him in to line-produce the pilot for *MacGyver*, a show Winkler produced after starring in *Happy Days*.

After Di Bona started his own production company, his wife pointed out a funny clip of a frilled lizard on the local news. It turned out the clip came from a Japanese game show about animals. Di Bona acquired the U.S. rights to the show and pitched it to ABC. ABC bought *Animal Crack-Ups* and ran it on Saturday mornings, replacing *American Bandstand*.

Another Japanese series was brought to his attention, a variety show that finished up with funny home videos from early camcorders. "They asked me what I thought and I told them, 'Variety is dead. Let's just run all home videos and make it a contest,'" Di Bona recalled. "And guess what? It worked."

Di Bona said that people have been offering to buy his company for the last 15 years. The deal he agreed to was brought



Above, Di Bona did his deal with two old friends, producer John Stevens (top) and Hans Schiff of V10 Entertainment. Below: Host Alfonso Ribeiro on the set of America's Funniest Home Videos.

to him by two old friends, producer John Stevens, who recently sold his own company, and Hans Schiff, Di Bona's former agent.

"They convinced a money management company [Clarion Capital] to put up or shut up. And they made a really wonderful deal for me. I get to play in the playpen and cash in a little bit for the future of my family. So it kind of all worked out," DiBona said.

DiBona's companies will be run as part of V10 Entertainment. Stevens is CEO and Schiff is president.

"Vin is one of the most successful and well-respected television producers of all time," Stevens said.

"We are thrilled to have the opportunity to work alongside Vin Di Bona and his incredible team," Schiff said. "There is no greater way to transition from a 25-year career in representation to production with one of the finest producers in television."

A week after the deal was done, the company had a town hall meeting with the staff.

"The most important thing these guys said was, 'We're not changing a thing,'" Di Bona said. "We'd be foolish to do anything like that. It works."

The new partners also explained that the investment from Clarion should mean new opportunities as additional

production companies are acquired and there are new shows to work on.

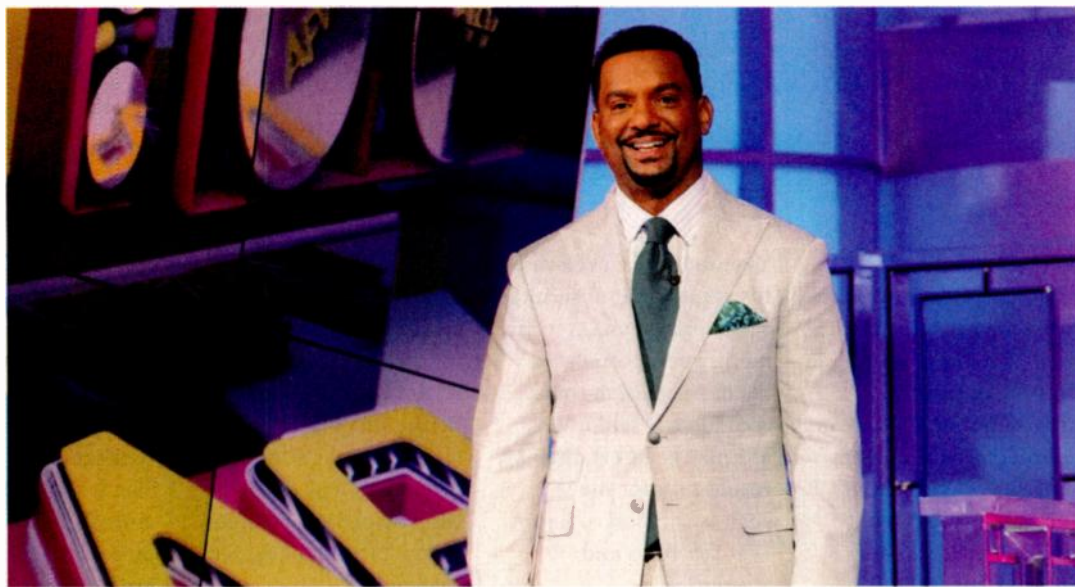
Giving Young Creators a Shot

DiBona said he hopes that the company will be able to provide opportunities for young people with good ideas. "The problem with young people with good ideas is if they go to a network, it can take two years to make a deal," he said. "They don't have the money to sustain them, so it's very difficult."

When media companies make deals these days, they want to own the content. "I got lucky," Di Bona said. "When I made that first deal with ABC for *Animal Crack-Ups*, we became 50-50 partners. When [AFV] came along, I was able to make that same deal. Those deals aren't available today. They weren't available 15 years ago."

In addition to AFV, Vin Di Bona Productions and FishBowl Worldwide Media, Di Bona produces a number of other shows and they have more in the works.

Di Bona said he's doing a crime show for Amazon Prime Video and will be launching a new variety show for CBS. "With ABC, we're about to make a deal," he said. "There's a lot in the works. But you know, it just takes time. Damn, it takes forever. Persistence is what our business is. It's not for the faint of heart." ●



People

Notable executives on the move



CBS

CBS has elevated **Eric Kim** to executive VP, current programming, overseeing current primetime and daytime programming for the network and studio. An 11-year CBS veteran, he had been overseeing all aspects of production on the network's comedy and drama series.



CBS NEWS

Shanelle Kaul has joined CBS News as a correspondent for the CBS Television Network, CBS News Radio and Newspath, reporting to the CBS News Special Events and Newsgathering units. She comes from Canadian news network CP24.



CHARTER

Elisa Reid has been elevated to senior VP, application platform services at Charter Communications, based in Stamford, Connecticut. She most recently served as the cable operator's group VP, service delivery applications.



CINEDIGM

Cinedigm has hired **Marc Rashba** as executive VP, partnerships, responsible for business development, programming content deals and selling Cinedigm's proprietary technology Matchpoint to third parties. He had been president of MovieMethod LLC.



COMCAST

Jason S. Armstrong has been promoted to chief financial officer at Comcast Corp., succeeding Mike Cavanagh, who had been promoted to president in October. A nine-year veteran, Armstrong most recently was deputy CEO and treasurer.



FOX

Fox Entertainment has promoted **Allison Wallach** to president, unscripted programming, responsible for Fox's unscripted programming, specials and alternative development slate. She was executive VP and head of unscripted studio Fox Alternative Entertainment (FAE).



FOX

Yasmin Rawji was elevated to executive VP, unscripted - network at Fox Entertainment, a new post. Based in Los Angeles, she most recently was senior VP, alternative entertainment, responsible for shows such as *The Masked Singer*, *Next Level Chef* and *MasterChef*.



GRAY

Gray Television has promoted **Collin Gaston** to senior VP, with oversight for the company's TV stations in the South, Texas and Colorado. He was a regional VP and general manager of Gray-owned Fox affiliate WBRC Birmingham, Alabama.



HALLMARK MEDIA

Kelly Garrett has joined Hallmark Media as Studio City, California-based VP of development, involved in development of the company's holiday programming. A 14-year The Walt Disney Co. veteran, she was executive director, original programming at Freeform.



NBCU LOCAL

NBCUniversal Local has named **Tony Canales** as president and GM of NBC station KXAS and Telemundo station KXTX, both in Dallas-Fort Worth, succeeding the retiring Tom Ehlmann. He had been president/GM of Telemundo stations KTMD Houston and KASA Albuquerque.



NBCU LOCAL

Hank Guerrero was named president and general manager of NBCUniversal Local's WVIT-WRDM in Hartford, Connecticut. He had been VP of sales for WVIT, which is branded NBC Connecticut, and WRDM, branded as Telemundo Connecticut.



NESN

Matthew Volk has joined New England Sports Network as chief operating officer, overseeing programming, production, operations, creative services and public relations. He was senior VP of Audacy's sports division, responsible for sports and sports-betting content.



SCRIPPS

The E.W. Scripps Co. promoted **Lisa Knutson** to chief operating officer, tasked with leading a reorganization of the media company, with the Scripps Networks and local media units reporting to her. She had been president of Scripps Networks.



SINCLAIR

Sinclair Broadcast Group has named **Cory Culleton** VP, associate group manager, overseeing the Raleigh, North Carolina; Pensacola, Florida-Mobile, Alabama; and Tallahassee and Gainesville, Florida, markets. He'll continue as VP and GM of WEAR-WFGX Pensacola.



STARZ

Starz has promoted **Darren Nielson** to executive VP, international networks, at Starz, overseeing the Lionsgate Plus streaming service in the U.K., Latin America and Brazil, Canada and Australia. He had been executive VP, international development and partnerships.



TELEvisaUNIVISION

Fernando Romero has joined TelevisaUnivision as senior VP of digital advertising sales, responsible for national ad sales revenue across digital, streaming, branded social, experiential and digital audio properties. He had been head of advertising sales at Fuse Media.



WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY

Warner Bros. Discovery has promoted **David Decker** to president, content sales, overseeing the unit that licenses all third-party content in North America, as well as direct-to-consumer and retail sales. He had been executive VP, content licensing.



WLJT

The Western Tennessee Public Television Council appointed **Peter Noll** as general manager and CEO of WLJT in Martin, Tennessee. Described as a lifelong viewer of PBS, he most recently was GM at NBC affiliate WNBK Jackson, Tennessee.

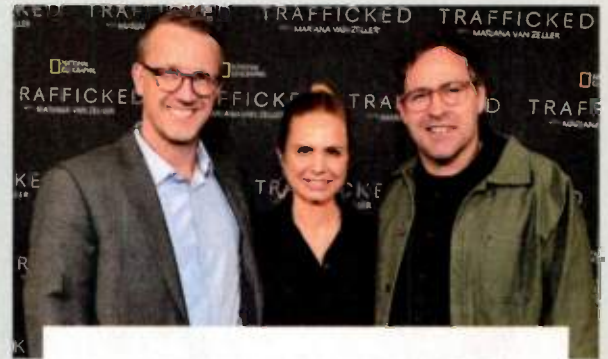
BRIEFLY NOTED

Other industry execs making moves

Harold Morgenstern has joined Allen Media Group as president, direct advertising sales and partnerships, a new post. He had been chief revenue officer at Plex. ... Gray Television also upped **Jason Matthews** general manager of WBRC, succeeding Collin Gaston. He was WBRC's general sales manager. ... Internet and competitive networks association INCOMPAS has promoted **Angie Kronenberg** to president from chief advocate and general counsel, named **Chris Shipley** as executive director, public policy and added **Caroline Boothe Olsen** as director, communications and public affairs. ... **K. Dane Snowden** has joined law firm Wilkinsons Barker Knauer as a senior adviser in its Washington, D.C. office. Most recently president and CEO of the Internet Association, he is former chief operating officer at NCTA-The Internet & Television Association and a former Federal Communications Commission official.



At the red carpet premiere of FX's *Kindred* at Avalon Hollywood (from l.): **Eric Schrier**, president of Disney Television Studios & Business Operations, Disney General Entertainment; **Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins**, executive producer/writer; and **Nick Grad**, co-president, FX Entertainment.



(From l.): Director **Bengt Anderson**, **Mariana van Zeller** and producer **Jeff Plunkett** at a "tastemaker dinner" for season three of National Geographic's *Trafficked with Marian van Zeller* at The Valentine in Los Angeles.



Adam Sharp (l.), president and CEO of NATAS, and Lifetime Achievement honoree **LeVar Burton** at the inaugural Children's & Family Emmy Awards at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles.



At the premiere of Apple TV Plus's *Echo 3* at New York's Walter Reade Theater (l. to r.): **Peter Traugott**, **Mark Sourian**, writer/director **Mark Boal**, **Jessica Ann Collins**, **Luke Evans**, **Michiel Huisman** and **Pablo Trapero**.



(From l.): **Sharon Lawrence**, **Soleil Moon Frye** and **Quinn Copeland**, three generations of *Punky Brewster* stars, at the Children's & Family Emmy Awards in Los Angeles.

Frank Micelotta/PictureGroup for FX, Scott Kirkland/PictureGroup for Nat Geo, Marc Bryan-Brown; Marion Curtis/StarPix for Apple TV

80th Annual Golden Globe Awards



On the red carpet before the 80th Annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton (l to r.): **Kelly Campbell**, president, Peacock and Direct-to-Consumer, NBCUniversal; **Mark Lazarus**, chairman, NBCUniversal Television and Streaming; **Frances Berwick**, chairman, Entertainment Networks, NBCU Television and Streaming; and **Susan Rovner**, chairman, Entertainment Content, NBCU Television and Streaming.



Donna Langley (l.), chairman, Universal Filmed Entertainment Group; and **Jeff Shell**, CEO, NBCUniversal, arrive at the Beverly Hilton Hotel for the Golden Globe Awards.



Julia Garner (l.), who won a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress in a TV Series for *Ozark*, and **Jennifer Coolidge**, winner for Best Supporting Actress in a Limited Series, Anthology or Movie made for TV for *The White Lotus*, arrive at the ceremony.



(From l.): **Sheryl Lee Ralph**, **Janelle James**, **Quinta Brunson** and **Lisa Ann Walter** accept the Golden Globe for Best Television Series, Musical or Comedy for ABC's *Abbott Elementary*.



Honoree **Ryan Murphy** (at microphone) accepts the **Carol Burnett Award** from **Billy Porter** during the 80th Annual Golden Globe Awards ceremony in Beverly Hills.

Ad Meter

Who's spending what where

JANUARY ADVERTISING RECAP

The most-seen brands and industries on TV, and more



IMPRESSIONS SPOTLIGHT

Highlighted below are looks at top programs and networks ranked by TV ad impressions delivered in Jan. 2023

Total TV ad impressions: **595.1 billion** (down 9.5% YoY)

Big Four (ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC) primetime TV ad impressions: **41.5 billion** (down 11.7% YoY)

Key takeaway: iSpot's January TV ad recap highlights the NFL's dominance over the start of the calendar year, as the end of the regular season and pre-Super Bowl playoff rounds account for over 17% of ad impressions on the month. That's 7.5 times the impressions of the No. 2 programming, as the rankings reveal.

TOP 5 PROGRAMMING, JAN. 2023

By share of TV ad impressions – new program airings only

- 1. NFL** 

Share of impressions: **17.55%**
Top advertiser: **Verizon (3.20%)**
- 2. Men's College Basketball** 

Share of impressions: **2.35%**
Top advertiser: **Progressive (2.62%)**
- 3. NBA** 


Share of impressions: **2.34%**
Top advertiser: **Google Pixel (3.25%)**
- 4. Good Morning America** 


Share of impressions: **1.84%**
Top advertiser: **GOLO (2.31%)**
- 5. College Football** 


Share of impressions: **1.82%**
Top advertiser: **AT&T Wireless (4.41%)**


TOP ADVERTISERS


By share of TV ad impressions (Jan. 2023)

- 1** 

Share of Impressions: **1.08%**
Top Network: **NBC (11.65%)**
Top Program: **NFL (17.55%)**
- 2** 

Share of Impressions: **0.83%**
Top Network: **Ion (8.42%)**
Top Program: **Law & Order: SVU (3.66%)**
- 3** 

Share of Impressions: **0.59%**
Top Network: **NBC (18.26%)**
Top Program: **NFL (39.70%)**
- 4** 

Share of Impressions: **0.59%**
Top Network: **Fox (8.54%)**
Top Program: **NFL (7.11%)**
- 5** 

Share of Impressions: **0.58%**
Top Network: **Fox (13.95%)**
Top Program: **NFL (15.58%)**

MOST-SEEN INDUSTRIES

By share of TV ad impressions (Jan. 2023)

- 1) QSR (3.89%)
- 2) Automakers (3.82%)
- 3) Auto & General Insurance (3.44%)
- 4) Streaming Services (2.67%)
- 5) Vitamins & Supplements (2.39%)
- 6) Weight Loss (2.11%)
- 7) Skin & Foot Care (2.10%)
- 8) Wireless Services (2.00%)
- 9) OTC: Allergies, Cold & Flu (1.81%)
- 10) Pizza (1.75%)

TOP NETWORKS

By share of TV ad impressions – new program airings only (Jan. 2023)

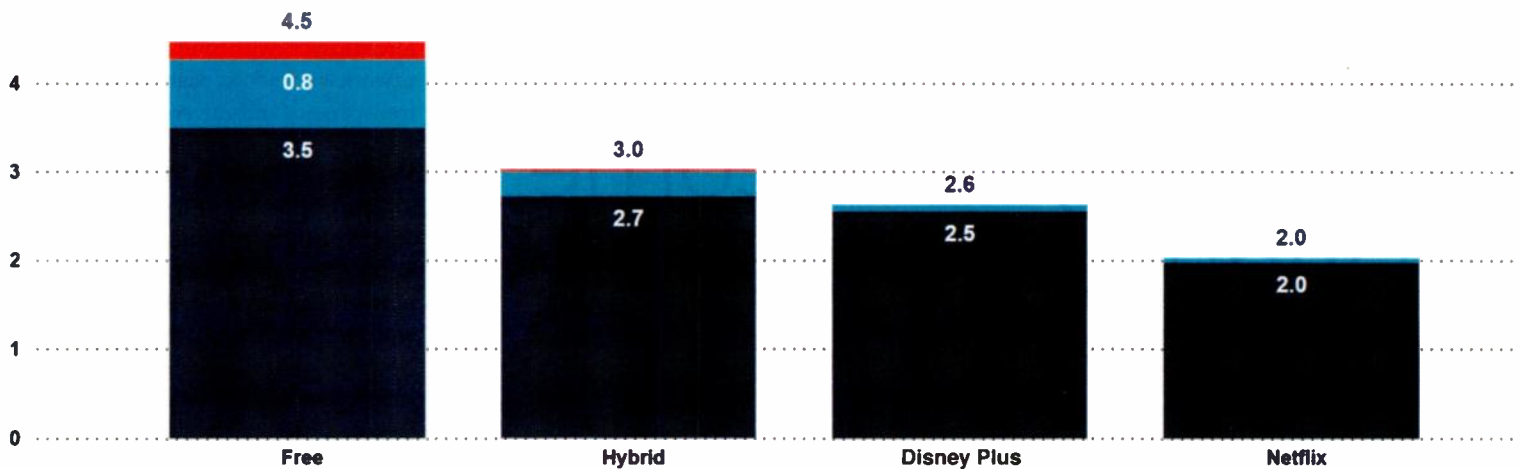
- 1) CBS (16.61%)
- 2) NBC (13.51%)
- 3) ABC (12.25%)
- 4) Fox (9.47%)
- 5) Fox News (7.76%)
- 6) ESPN (6.71%)
- 7) CNN (4.20%)
- 8) Univision (3.81%)
- 9) MSNBC (3.05%)
- 10) Telemundo (2.26%)

HOW NETFLIX, DISNEY PLUS AD TIERS COMPARE ON AD MINUTES PER HOUR

Netflix and Disney Plus both launched ad-supported tiers in late 2022, pitting them against other established AVODs in the marketplace. One Touch Intelligence's audit of their early days suggest that both feature lighter ad loads than their ad-supported peers had averaged during 2022.

AVERAGE AD DURATION PER HOUR (IN MINUTES)

AD TYPE: PAID ● PROMO ● PSA ●



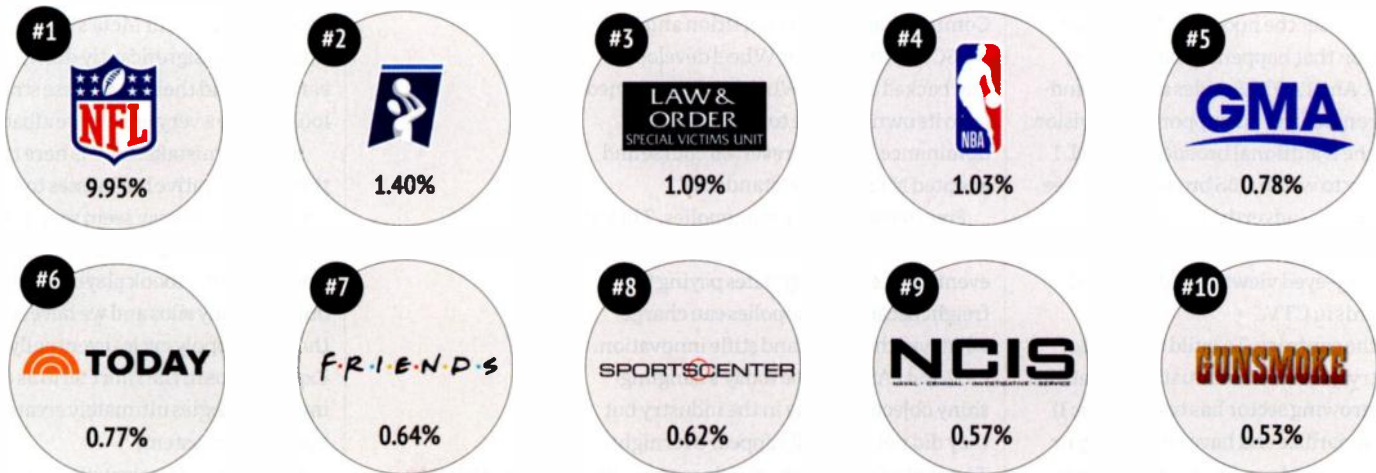
SOURCE: One Touch Intelligence content audits. "Hybrid" and "Free" categories represent averages compiled for all of 2022. Disney Plus data is December 2022 only. Netflix average is for November and December 2022. Audited "Free" services include Crackle, Freevee, Pluto TV, The Roku Channel, Tubi, and Xumo. Audited "Hybrid" services include Discovery Plus, HBO Max, Hulu, Paramount Plus and Peacock.

VIZIO

January's Most-Watched TV Programming

INSCAPE

Of all the live, linear minutes watched on VIZIO smart TVs in January, 9.95% was spent watching the NFL. Other sports programming like college basketball and NBA games were also among the most-watched by audiences.



Via VIZIO's Inscope, the TV data company with insights from a panel of 20 million active and opted-in smart TVs. Data is linear, live TV only and includes all episode types (new and reruns). Rankings are by percent share duration, defined as "of all the live, linear minutes watched from Jan. 1 - Jan. 30, 2023, X% of the time was spent on show Y."



By Bruce Anderson
@InvidiBruce

Connected TV Needs One Thing To Become An Industry: Standards

Walled gardens won't scale the platform into a business

I found myself in a classic “chicken or the egg” TV industry debate at a recent business dinner. The conversation centered on whether the internet and connected TV led to innovations in television, or whether the massive revenue increases from advanced TV advertising led to investments in innovations like CTV, streaming and a move toward digital-first distribution.

How the bits make it from point A to point B on a screen doesn't matter, whether it's a set-top box, tablet or mobile phone. Under the hood, CTV is still just television that happens to be delivered over IP. And FAST? Besides a cool-sounding acronym, free ad-supported television is still the traditional broadcast model. I don't pay to watch CBS broadcast TV free over the air — advertisers do!

Somebody at the dinner table pushed this starry-eyed view: “You don't need standards in CTV.”

On the contrary. To build any kind of industry, you must eventually standardize. Every growing sector has two choices: 1) you standardize and have an industry or 2) you don't and you have a monopoly or, worse, an ad hoc conglomerate.

I know about this cycle. My own company was one-half of an addressable advertising tech duopoly and we've now

grown as much as we can in the U.S. We must now work to standardize and build an industry so that we can work with the other partners in the space to grow it. That's the only way forward.

The entire TV industry is based on this classic business arc. RCA was once an early example of vertical integration, owning content creation (via NBC), transmission (through station-group ownership) and manufacturing (making cameras and TV sets). When the move to color was happening, the Federal Communications Commission held a competition and RCA's NTSC lost to the Color Wheel developed and backed by CBS. When RCA threatened to go its own way due to its market dominance, the FCC reversed course and adopted NTSC as the “standard.”

Free markets abhor monopolies. They'll put up with them for a little while but eventually, everybody hates paying the freight because monopolies can charge whatever they want and stifle innovation. CTV and FAST may be today's dangling shiny objects to many in the industry but they did not magically appear overnight. They both followed the classic monopoly-to-standardization pattern that started with the internet's birth in the '60s.

The tech monoliths have created their own monopolies by building impenetrable

silos for advertisers, but even those are slowly starting to crumble.

Google's ad monopoly started being chipped away the second the IAB and major advertisers banded together to create header bidding and threw pebbles into the Google Ad Manager gears. Suddenly, the playing field was leveled and Google was forced to work with companies it never had to work with before, pushing it toward transparency and universal standards.

Walled Gardens Won't Grow

Meta's time is certainly going to come. It offers a platform to create campaigns that can exist only on its own network and nowhere else. In the short term, Facebook will continue to attract advertising dollars. But in the long run, like many other content companies, its walled strategy will become a loser and it will have to conform with standards just like Google.

The tide is turning against Facebook on two fronts: Advertisers are tiring of making endless calls to multiple ad tech ecosystems to reach their desired audiences, especially when they want to know exactly what they are getting in return for their investment and added work.

At the same time, Facebook's prime demographic is moving out of the age group that advertisers really care about, pushing the company into an identity crisis, even trying to make themselves look like TikTok. Parent Meta's stock spent much of 2022 significantly down on weak earnings, and their metaverse strategy is looking like a very expensive albatross.

Make no mistake: CTV is here to stay and there are lucrative businesses to be built around it. They may seem sexy as the new shiny tech gadgets. Taking pages from the Google and Facebook playbook, they've built up many silos and we have seen how those monopoly cycles eventually fail. Expect chaos in the short term as competing technologies ultimately create a stable business ecosystem.

However, the hockey stick of growth will not come for CTV until everything works the same way when standards are in place, even if it is “the Wild West of the internet.” ●

Bruce Anderson
is CEO and global
chief technology
officer of Invidi
Technologies.

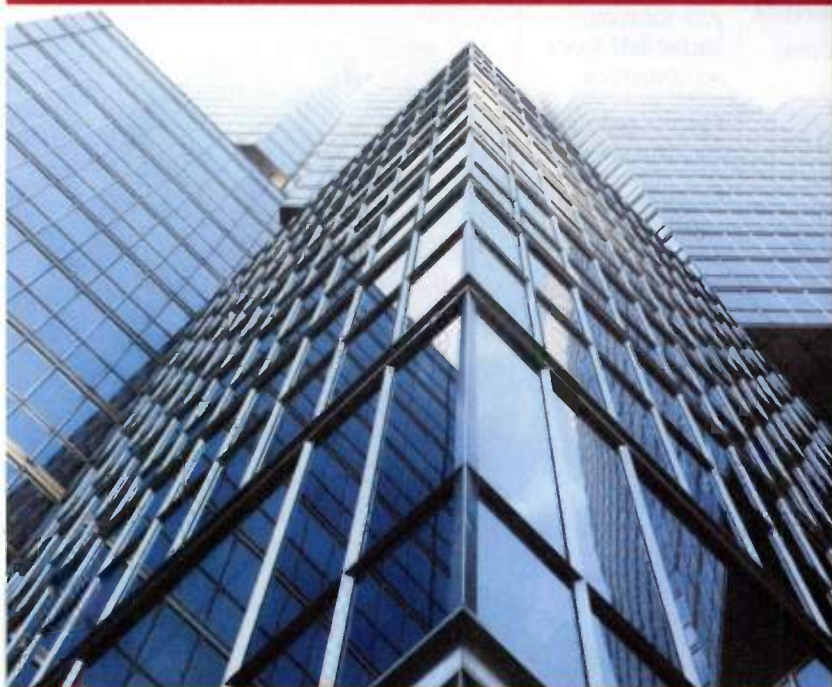
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Karin Slaughter

Author and Executive Producer,
'Will Trent'

Prolific author helps adapt her book series on Georgia investigator into an ABC show

Will Trent, about a special agent with a troublesome background, including being abandoned at birth and enduring a rough childhood in foster care, debuted on ABC January 3. Ramón Rodríguez portrays Trent, who works for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Of her 23 novels, Karin Slaughter has written 10 with Trent as her main character. Her novel *Pieces of Her* was adapted into a series on Netflix last year.

Slaughter is an executive producer on *Will Trent*, and spoke with B+C Multichannel News senior content producer, programming Michael Malone about the challenge of adapting a book to television, what makes the show timely and what Rodríguez brings to the title role. An edited transcript follows.

Where did the idea for *Will Trent* initially come from? I was looking to write about a detective who was more like the guys I grew up with. A lot of them were raised by single moms. Will was raised in a children's home by a woman, and he's been guided through his life by many strong women. He listens to women, which is a very sexy thing for guys to do. And he's very tuned into reading the room. Because he has a reading disability, he has to pick up on cues. He has to look for changes in tone. He's much more tuned into that, which is what makes him a great detective.



Ramón Rodríguez stars in ABC's *Will Trent*.

What's the biggest challenge in adapting a novel to television? They've taken the first two *Will Trent* books, *Triptych* and *Fractured*, and melded them together in a way that I had never anticipated would work so well.

Did you work on the screenplays? I didn't. I gave my notes and the little thoughts that I had. But the book is the book and the show is the show.

What makes the show relevant in 2023? [The producers] really picked up what was important to me in the books, which is, the plot has to be as interesting as the characters, and the characters have to be as interesting as the plot. So you've got Will, who has a lot of baggage from his childhood. You've got his situation with Angie. You've got Faith, who has this underlying hatred for him because he investigated her mother in the Atlanta Police Department. And then you've got a very mysterious relationship that Amanda has with Will that we don't know quite that much about yet. So there's a lot of emotional

stuff that resonates in addition to a really cracking seat-of-your-pants kind of thriller.

What does Ramón bring to the title role? First, he's very sexy. That has to be said.

When he plays Will, you get the sense that this is a really smart guy. He understands what he's doing. He's aware that sometimes his personality can be a little off-putting. But he's made a choice as an adult to do the right thing.

A lot of kids who grow up in foster care get caught up in the system, and that horrible trap of not having any support. Will has been able to right himself and make a choice that he's going to do the right thing and try to help other people. I think Ramón is amazing at conveying that. ●

BONUS FIVE

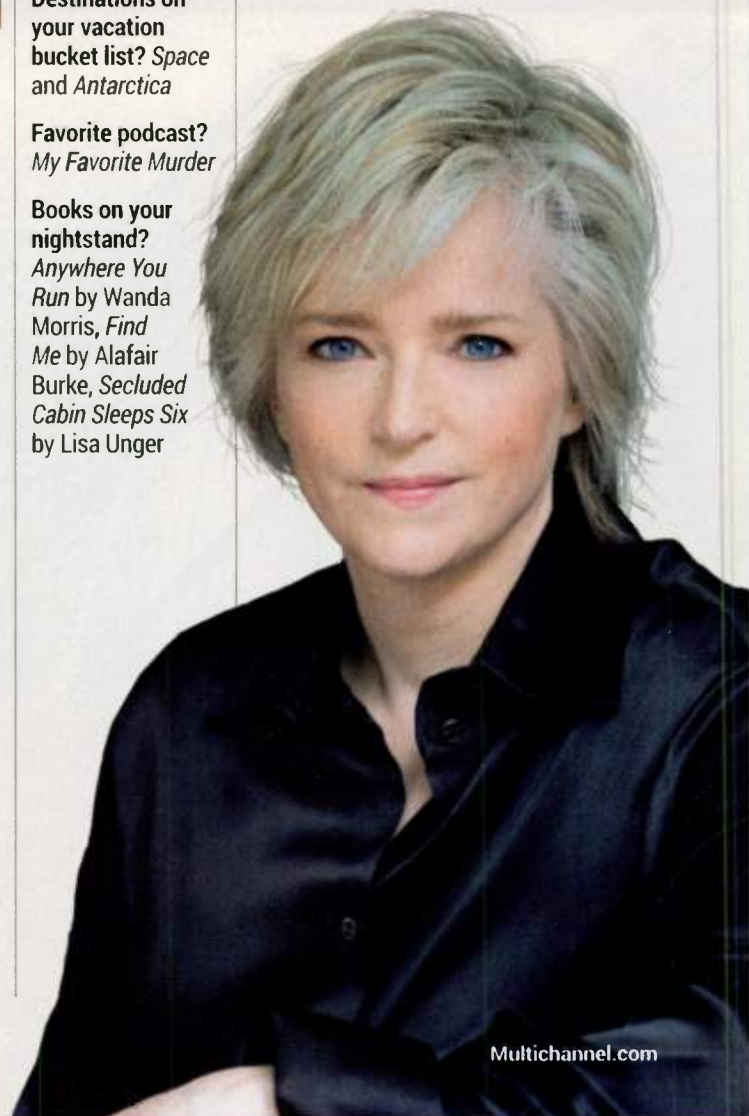
All-time top TV show? *The X-Files*

Favorite app? *New York Times* crossword (Wordle)

Destinations on your vacation bucket list? *Space* and *Antarctica*

Favorite podcast? *My Favorite Murder*

Books on your nightstand? *Anywhere You Run* by Wanda Morris, *Find Me* by Alafair Burke, *Secluded Cabin Sleeps Six* by Lisa Unger



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