Network pitches for fall emphasize different demographics

The aging of the American population is an undisputed phenomenon, but the three television networks are viewing that demographic development from different perspectives in selling their new fall prime-time schedules.

ABC-TV, which skew toward younger viewers, has developed a presentation zeroing in on the 18-49 age group as the TV target audience for advertisers. CBS-TV, whose audience tilts older, is accenting the value of the 25-54 segment. And NBC-TV, which demographically falls between ABC-TV and CBS-TV but has been enlarging its share of the 18-49 audience, is pointing out its gains in that age category.

Networks agree wholeheartedly on one point: The 25-49 group is the prize target. But where ABC and CBS differ is that the former contends that the 18-24 layer is more vital to the advertiser than the one above 49, while CBS insists that the older portion of the population represents a better advertising target.

ABC's argument holds that the 18-24's are the logical targets for advertisers because there are two-and-a-half more of them than the 50-54's; they are a "vital market" in terms of the percentage of their income spent and of their potential for ongoing consumption, and they are a market that must be targeted on TV to be reached. At ABC we recognize their particular importance as viewers and as consumers, and we have made them (and will continue to make them) an integral part of our program planning.

In contrast, a CBS-TV presentation recommends that for the decade ahead, advertisers replace the 18-49 category with the 25-54 group in their evaluation. It claims that by 1990, the 25-44 and the 45-54 categories of the population will continue to grow percentagewise and in household discretionary income.

Conversely the 18-24 segment represents little potential to the marketer of most products and services," the presentation maintains. "This segment of the population will decline as a percent of the population during the 1980's. Their share of discretionary income will fall below its already minimal 1% level during this decade."

NBC-TV does not have an over-all presentation, according to Bob Blackmore, vice president, sales. But he pointed out that in the 1979-80 season, the network has made substantial gains in both the 18-49 male and female audiences while ABC-TV has dropped significantly and CBS has grown modestly.

Beyond that, Blackmore believes that advertisers do not buy networks; they buy programs. He says NBC-TV has a well balanced and diversified programming range and can offer enough variety to satisfy the demographic requirements of advertisers.

Larson moving to Fox TV

Glen A. Larson, the leading producer of television series for Universal Television, has agreed to leave that production company and join 20th Century-Fox Television. In association with Universal, Larson's privately owned production company is responsible for five of the seven-and-a-half hours of Universal product on the fall television network schedules.

The producer will be moving his production company, Glen A. Larson Productions, to the Fox lot after his contract with Universal expires in March next year. He will produce series, made-for-television movies and miniseries for his new company. His is a four-year contract.

Larson's credits for the 1980-81 season include: NBC-TV's Bj and the Bear, Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, Quincy, The Misadventures of Sheriff Lobo and, for CBS-TV Magnum P.I. In past seasons he has made It Takes a Thief, McCloud, The Virginian, Battlestar Galactica and The Six Million Dollar Man.