

## New Tools for Picking Hits

### TV Advertisers Consult Formulas That Weigh Social-Media Buzz, Economic Data

By Emily Steel

Nielsen ranks TV shows by counting viewers, while Optimedia US's 'Content Power Ratings' also reflect factors like social-media buzz. Some comparisons follow.

The reason: the show generated the highest number of video views online—more than 10 times as many as the average number for other TV shows.

As they enter their annual negotiations with TV networks over billions of dollars of ad commitments for the coming season, advertisers are tapping new types of data, ranging from social-media buzz to economic statistics, to evaluate TV shows.

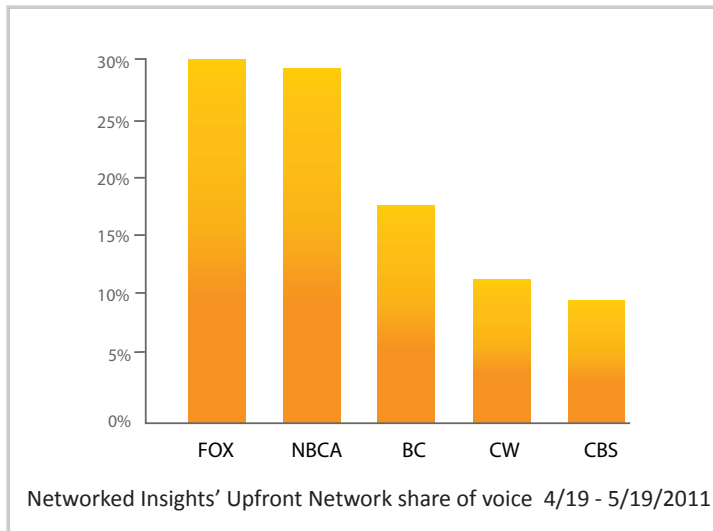
These new benchmarks go beyond traditional measures of how many people are tuning into a show. Instead, they seek to give advertisers a more sophisticated indicator of a program or network's impact on its audience.

Research teams on Madison Avenue have developed elaborate models that monitor conversations across online social networks and video sites to predict which shows will be hits. They also track how buying ad time during a particular show affects sales or how people perceive a brand.

Advertisers are seeking out these new tools partly because of this year's buoyant ad market and the substantial price increases expected for commercial time in the coming season. Marketers say that's forcing them to be choosier about where to invest their ad budgets. The new benchmarks are serving as a guide and negotiating tool, ad buyers say.

"It will be a sellers' market. For us, being able to come to the table with a threshold of what programs at what cost will drive our clients' business is extremely helpful," says Michael Haggerty, director of marketing accountability and research at Universal McCann, a media-buying firm owned by Interpublic Group of Cos., whose clients include Johnson & Johnson, Mastercard Inc., Sony Corp. and L'Oreal SA.

Publicis Groupe SA ad-buying firm Optimedia US compiles a list that ranks the size of television audiences across TV, the Web and on mobile devices.



This year, the firm stepped up the social-media component of its rankings, because mentions of programs on Facebook Inc. and Twitter Inc. increasingly spur people to watch them, says Optimedia US Chief Executive Antony Young.

As illustrated by the "South Park" case, some rankings on this year's Optimedia list contrasted sharply with the ratings figures from Nielsen Co. Both firms ranked Fox Broadcasting's singing competition "American Idol" No. 1. But Nielsen ranked the Fox musical "Glee" 55 by number of viewers, while Optimedia, taking note of the online activity the series generated, ranked it No. 2. Fox is owned by News Corp., which also owns The Wall Street Journal.

It remains to be seen how effective the new tools will be in picking hits and whether they will replace more conventional audience-measurement data over the long term. They haven't led to any new pricing models for ads, but marketers are increasingly using them to help with allocating ad spending.

**Publicis's Starcom Worldwide is working with start-up Networked Insights, which measures the impact of a show on social-media sites to forecast the show's ad value. After TV networks made glitzy presentations to showcase their lineups to ad buyers last week, Networked Insights forecast which shows would be hits.**

According to the firm, Fox is leading among the major networks, generating positive buzz about shows such as “The X-Factor.” NBC, a unit of Comcast Corp.’s NBC Universal, is second, with its dramas “Awake” and “Grim” and the comedy “Are you There Vodka? It’s Me, Chelsea.”

The new data “add more value to the billions of dollars we’re investing in this marketplace,” says Brandon Starkoff, a senior vice president at Starcom Worldwide.

Based on early buzz about the shows, Networked Insights also is forecasting several flops, including the Fox cartoon “Napoleon Dynamite,” based on the 2004 film, and “A Gifted Man” on CBS Corp.’s namesake network, because Internet users think the material dated and unoriginal.

Another likely flop, it says, is ABC’s “Work It!” about unemployed car salesmen who decide they live in a women’s world and start dressing as women to get jobs. Networked Insights says that, based on social-media conversations, the humor “seems out of touch and offensive.”

“These are the same type of studies that would only see ‘Cheers’ as a bar in Boston or ‘Everybody Loves Raymond’ as being about a guy that lived across the street from his parents,” said a spokesman for CBS. “If people worried about these kind of studies, many hit shows would never make it to air.”

Other major networks couldn’t be reached for comment.

At Universal McCann, analytics teams have created statistical models that pull in a range of TV viewership, company sales and broader economic data to determine how much commercial time marketers need to buy, and at what price, in order to meet specific sales goals or change the way that people think about the brand.

The agency’s ad-buying teams are using those tools for the first time in this year’s upfront negotiations to determine how much ad space to buy across various TV networks and other media, based on the ad rates.

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“It allows us to say, ‘If TV is going to be very expensive, how much can we re-allocate dollars to a different version of video to get the best price in the market?’” says Universal McCann’s Mr. Haggerty.

Some new-fangled research techniques still sound a bit far-fetched, ad buyers say. TV networks, including Walt Disney Co.’s ESPN and Fox, have pushed biometric research that tracks the emotional connection viewers have to a show by measuring variables like viewer’s brain waves and eye movements.

The technology involves attaching sensors to a viewer’s head to capture their brain waves or a camera to monitor their eye movements. The sales team from Fox recently sent an email to ad buyers that touts such research for its ability to measure the emotional impact of a show.

But some ad buyers are skeptical. “I can’t tell if it is supposed to be tongue in cheek or not,” says David Campanelli, director of national TV for Horizon Media, an independent ad-buying firm. “This stuff is way far away from actually being implemented in any measurement or guarantees.”

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