

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Audience Is King

Meyer Shwarzstein · Wednesday, June 24th, 2015

I've been having discussions recently with TV networks – most of whom are suffering a decline of ratings. While piracy and cord-cutting are partly to blame, I think many of the networks have abandoned their original identities and thus their core constituencies – they didn't treat their customers with enough respect.

The key to success in our business is not library aggregation. In fact, I do not believe that content is king.

The key to success in our business is audience aggregation. The customer is king.

If we don't show the customers that we are there to cater to their needs, then why should they show any loyalty to us?

Networks who provide consistency to their viewers reap the benefits. Turn on ESPN, Hallmark, Disney Channel or TCM any time of day, and you'll be getting what you expect. But the bulk of the networks are now forced to show the same reruns from days gone by to get ratings — why? Because their viewers aren't coming to them for anything else. Indeed, they're not sure why they're coming to most of them at all – except to see the 3,457th run of *Wedding Crashers*.

I do not think this is bad news. In fact, I believe that anyone who wakes up to this fact is in a privileged position – as long as they mark out a direction, communicate it clearly and stick to it. It can't be a short time commitment.

That means that getting big ratings is no longer the goal. It means building a loyal following is. That means advertising is not the goal. Getting audiences that advertisers will be able to reach today, tomorrow and 10 years out is. That means that planners have to think beyond their individual careers and to build something that may outlast them.

And, if programmers do this well, it won't matter if they're delivering their shows via cable, satellite, telephone, over the top, or using 2 cups and a string. The key is to get audiences to come, sample and stay.

Loyalty is the coin of the realm. Authenticity is what's required to get loyalty. It's a risky choice. All real leadership is.

This article originally appeared as a Facebook post in a group that discusses the entertainment

business.

Top image from Barbarella, currently running on TCM, courtesy Paramount Pictures.

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