



Media Insights

A MAGNA publication

November 7, 2008

Cable Original Series Performance and Prognosis

By Brian Hughes

The cable networks have traditionally scheduled many of their strongest original series in the summer, when the regular broadcast season is finished. As audiences for these shows have grown larger and more consistent however, we have seen an increasing number fall and midseason berths.

The prognosis portion of our analysis for cable is a bit different than that of broadcast, because cable originals are much less likely to be pulled before the full number of ordered episodes air. Obviously, rating goals vary by network, and even a relatively low-rated original series may perform better than repeat programming that fills the rest of the schedule.

Below are some highlights on original cable series that have been running this fall:

Teens are often a hard to reach audience, and other than CW (and perhaps the FOX animated shows) most broadcast programming isn't really aimed at them. Cable offers a number of original shows that either target teens directly or at least appeal to them. Currently, there are several programs that have been strong among teens, including: **Lincoln Heights** on **ABC Family**, **Star Wars: Clone Wars** on **Cartoon Network**, **Chocolate News** on **Comedy Central**, and **My New BFF** on **MTV**.

FX continues to be one of the more prolific cable networks in terms of scripted original programming, and while both **Dirt** and **The Riches** were canceled after their abbreviated second seasons, new drama **Sons of Anarchy** has done well with young adults and will return for a second run. The comedy **It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia** seems to build audience every year and has already received an order for 39 additional episodes. **Testees**—the network's latest comedy to be paired with **Sunny**—has not been keeping up ratings-wise so its future is uncertain. **The Shield** will end its run in this month, but **Damages**, **Nip/Tuck**, and **Rescue Me** will all return in 2009.

Lifetime's Army Wives has shown remarkable resilience in its second season, maintaining strong ratings among women in spite of facing tough competition in ABC's **Brothers & Sisters**, among others. New comedy **Rita Rocks** was not particularly strong in its first week, performing slightly worse than its **Reba** lead-in. The network may decide not to order additional episodes if it can get the same or better ratings from an off-network show it already has the rights for.

The following chart looks at original cable series performance this fall. Because of the wealth of unscripted cable shows, we are only including those that average at least a 1.0 household rating. Scripted series are included regardless of rating size.



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Program	Date	HH	T12-17	A18-34	A18-49	A25-54
ABC Family						
Lincoln Heights Tue 8-9 (return 9/16)	9/16	1.01	2.14	0.39	0.49	0.47
	9/23	0.65	0.90	0.36	0.37	0.30
	9/30	0.72	1.23	0.49	0.41	0.27
	10/7	0.81	1.11	0.56	0.47	0.31
	10/14	0.66	1.01	0.49	0.37	0.25
	10/21	0.68	1.30	0.49	0.45	0.31
	10/28	0.62	0.96	0.37	0.32	0.24
Premiered well, but took a hit when the broadcast networks began rolling out their schedules. Has since bounced back and remains relatively strong among teens, which is exactly the audience ABC Family is targeting.						
AMC						
Mad Men Sun 10-11 (return 7/27)	9/7	1.11	0.02	0.44	0.59	0.75
	9/14	1.23	0.09	0.53	0.67	0.75
	9/21	0.51	0.02	0.22	0.21	0.18
	9/28	1.03	0.01	0.60	0.64	0.70
	10/5	0.91	0.02	0.40	0.44	0.54
	10/12	1.03	0.04	0.38	0.54	0.63
	10/19	0.97	0.05	0.32	0.47	0.51
10/26	1.19	0.24	0.44	0.54	0.64	
Ratings have not been particularly strong for this series, but the critical praise has. After a big Emmy win in September, a third season seemed all but inevitable (AMC wants it, but creator Matthew Weiner is still in negotiations). There is a significant amount of DVR recording for this show.						
BET						
Somebodies Tue 10-10:30 (premiere 9/9)	9/9	0.46	0.47	0.28	0.28	0.25
	9/16	0.22	0.11	0.21	0.16	0.12
	9/23	0.43	0.77	0.33	0.23	0.16
	9/30	0.41	0.49	0.36	0.26	0.23
	10/7	0.27	0.26	0.21	0.22	0.19
	10/14	0.36	0.56	0.29	0.21	0.19
	10/21	0.42	0.58	0.38	0.30	0.17
10/28	0.33	0.44	0.23	0.16	0.12	
BET's first scripted original has been inconsistent week to week, and isn't as strong as some of the network's unscripted shows. That said, it has received positive reviews in the press and there is a relative shortage of sitcoms focused on African-American characters. BET hasn't yet picked up a second season.						
Cartoon Network						
Star Wars: Clone Wars Fri 9-9:30 (premiere 10/3)	10/3	2.36	2.68	1.06	0.98	0.93
	10/10	1.71	1.75	0.80	0.69	0.71
	10/17	1.60	1.80	0.60	0.67	0.63
	10/24	1.55	1.12	0.72	0.65	0.60
While Cartoon is targeting boys with its Friday night action/adventure block, the Star Wars brand has appeal beyond the kids' audience. The premiere was very strong, and though there was a significant drop in week two, the teen numbers remain solid.						

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Program	Date	HH	T12-17	A18-34	A18-49	A25-54
Comedy Central						
Sarah Silverman Prgm.	10/8	1.50	1.34	2.19	1.37	0.76
Thu 10:30-11	10/16	0.84	0.79	0.72	0.58	0.53
(return 10/8)	10/23	0.81	1.15	0.69	0.50	0.39
	10/30	0.86	0.90	1.11	0.74	0.40
In spite of a nearly a year passing since the last new episode, the network is calling this the second half of season two. The premiere (which followed South Park on Wednesday) was very strong against the young adult audience, but the Thursday time slot has not been quite as kind.						
Chocolate News	10/15	1.34	1.29	1.66	1.20	0.88
Wed 10:30-11	10/22	1.11	1.10	1.10	0.86	0.67
(premiere 10/15)	10/29	1.21	1.27	1.43	1.00	0.72
Living Color alum David Alan Grier hosts this fake news magazine/sketch series, which seems to be equal parts Daily Show and Chappelle's Show . It is working well among teens and young adults. The network is undoubtedly pleased with it.						
FX						
The Shield	9/2	1.39	0.29	0.88	0.98	1.07
Tue 10-11	9/9	1.10	0.28	0.71	0.85	0.92
(return 9/2)	9/16	1.22	0.37	0.67	0.93	1.00
	9/23	1.06	0.45	0.71	0.74	0.82
	9/30	0.93	0.24	0.70	0.75	0.75
	10/7	0.78	0.27	0.69	0.58	0.51
	10/14	0.88	0.24	0.53	0.67	0.73
	10/21	1.07	0.49	0.74	0.81	0.79
	10/28	1.07	0.23	0.74	0.86	0.93
The show's final season was delayed due to the Writers' Strike, and though ratings started out on par with its last run, there were declines once the broadcast networks began their fall season in earnest. Ratings gave bounced back in recent weeks, but they are still not quite up to level of previous seasons.						
Sons of Anarchy	9/3	1.63	0.66	1.26	1.17	1.11
Wed 10-11	9/10	1.45	0.43	1.14	1.14	1.13
(premiere 9/23)	9/17	1.32	0.73	1.00	0.94	0.87
	9/24	1.31	0.65	1.07	0.99	0.96
	10/1	1.39	0.65	1.17	1.13	1.03
	10/8	1.39	0.56	1.19	1.05	0.96
	10/15	1.24	0.48	1.13	0.98	0.96
	10/22	1.42	0.49	1.01	1.02	1.07
	10/29	1.38	0.38	1.11	1.06	0.96
Consistently delivering a 1.0 or better among adults 18-34 in its freshman season, this looks to be a solid new entry into FX's original stable. The network is so happy with it they already ordered a second season.						

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Program	Date	HH	T12-17	A18-34	A18-49	A25-54
FX						
It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia Thu 10-10:30 (return 9/24)	9/18	1.03	1.23	1.18	0.86	0.71
	9/25	0.89	0.64	1.23	0.77	0.55
	10/2	0.68	0.69	0.76	0.51	0.46
	10/9	0.75	0.40	1.12	0.70	0.48
	10/16	0.82	0.68	1.17	0.71	0.44
	10/23	0.80	0.58	1.05	0.73	0.50
	10/30	0.76	0.52	1.01	0.67	0.47
Although it's not quite as strong as the network's dramas, it seems to have a loyal audience and is posting solid numbers among adults 18-34 in its fourth season.						
Testeos Thu 10:30-11 (premiere 10/9)	10/9	0.62	0.37	0.82	0.53	0.33
	10/16	0.58	0.46	0.76	0.49	0.37
	10/23	0.50	0.45	0.62	0.45	0.30
	10/30	0.49	0.42	0.50	0.38	0.34
Loses a good chunk of its Always Sunny in Philadelphia lead-in, but seems to be a good fit creatively. FX ordered 13 episodes.						
Lifetime						
Rita Rocks Tue 8:30 (premiere 10/20)	10/21	0.91	0.38	0.45	0.51	0.55
Lifetime tried to make a splash with its first original comedy in many years by stripping it Monday through Friday during its opening week. It dipped from its lead-in of Reba repeats most nights, but on the bright side the highest rated telecast was Tuesday night, which will be its regular time slot. The network only ordered 13 episodes, so it was a major risk using up five in the first week.						
Army Wives Sun 10-11 (return 6/2)	9/7	2.63	0.32	1.28	1.51	1.64
	9/14	2.95	0.43	1.47	1.67	1.68
	9/21	2.93	0.66	1.48	1.79	1.85
	9/28	0.76	0.11	0.40	0.41	0.42
	10/5	2.32	0.45	1.40	1.38	1.40
	10/12	2.30	0.57	1.50	1.43	1.40
	10/19	2.41	0.67	1.27	1.34	1.33
	10/26	2.43	0.48	1.10	1.24	1.46
	11/2	2.63	0.40	1.59	1.59	1.61
Premiered in June, but the network ordered 19 episodes for the second season and with a few weeks of repeats mixed in, they lasted until November. Did take a slight hit when the broadcast season started (competing directly with Brother & Sisters on ABC) but overall, ratings remained strong, particularly among women demos. Lifetime announced in July that it picked up a third season of 18 episodes.						
MTV						
My New BFF Tue 10-10:30 (premiere 9/30)	9/30	1.09	1.18	1.17	0.76	0.43
	10/7	1.01	1.27	1.00	0.61	0.34
	10/14	1.18	1.46	1.36	0.81	0.37
	10/21	0.94	1.25	0.86	0.57	0.38
	10/28	0.69	0.84	0.72	0.45	0.26
Solid among the 12-34 target audience, so MTV should be pleased. Seems to have limited potential for additional seasons, but then again, it is Paris Hilton. Has shown declines in recent weeks.						

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Program	Date	HH	T12-17	A18-34	A18-49	A25-54
MTV						
RW/RR: The Island Wed 10-11 (return 9/10)	9/10	1.20	0.95	1.61	1.05	0.71
	9/17	1.26	1.04	1.63	1.08	0.79
	9/24	1.16	0.66	1.30	0.95	0.79
	10/1	1.13	0.78	1.42	0.93	0.64
	10/8	1.35	1.12	1.61	1.07	0.78
	10/15	1.24	1.02	1.54	1.02	0.74
	10/22	1.22	0.81	1.55	1.01	0.69
	10/29	1.34	0.94	1.83	1.13	0.67
For the 16 th season of its Real World/Road Rules crossover, MTV adopted a Survivor -like format. Strong among adults 18-34.						
Sci-Fi Channel						
Ghost Hunters Wed 9-10 (return 9/3)	9/3	1.61	0.89	1.15	1.27	1.38
	9/10	1.59	0.92	1.00	1.26	1.35
	9/17	1.48	0.71	0.79	1.04	1.20
	9/24	1.48	0.92	0.91	1.13	1.28
	10/1	1.61	0.79	0.94	1.16	1.31
	10/8	1.67	0.76	0.91	1.27	1.43
	10/15	1.56	0.88	1.05	1.16	1.25
	10/22	1.88	1.11	1.28	1.47	1.60
10/29	1.63	1.02	1.09	1.26	1.43	
After a break over the summer, the fourth season returned in September and remains a consistent performer for Sci-Fi. A 26-episode fifth season is already on tap for 2009.						
Sanctuary Fri 10-11 (premiere 10/13)	10/3	1.84	0.24	0.50	0.82	1.16
	10/10	1.32	0.18	0.41	0.68	0.95
	10/17	1.29	0.18	0.40	0.65	0.92
	10/24	1.16	0.10	0.25	0.50	0.73
Has declined consistently since its first week but is generally on par with the network's other originals. Strongest among adults 25-54.						
TNT						
Raising the Bar Mon 10-11 (premiere 9/1)	9/1	4.99	0.47	1.25	2.15	2.79
	9/8	3.46	0.44	0.82	1.23	1.73
	9/15	2.92	0.31	0.58	1.04	1.38
	9/22	1.75	0.36	0.45	0.58	0.77
	9/29	1.50	0.12	0.50	0.69	0.82
	10/6	1.64	0.38	0.52	0.68	0.77
	10/13	1.31	0.20	0.25	0.52	0.68
	10/20	1.55	0.13	0.63	0.75	0.81
10/27	1.71	0.23	0.47	0.70	0.84	
After a very strong premiere that was heavily promoted during its Closer lead-in (and that featured limited commercial interruptions), it declined steadily over the next few weeks. The decline hastened when The Closer 's season ended September 15 th , but it seems to have leveled off. At this point, its ratings are below other TNT originals that did not make it to a second season (Saved , Heartland).						

Cable Original Series Performance and Prognosis

Program	Date	HH	T12-17	A18-34	A18-49	A25-54
USA						
Law & Order: CI Thu 10-11 (return 11/7)						
The Starter Wife Fri 10-11 (return 10/10)	10/10 10/17 10/24 10/31	1.89 1.37 1.38 1.29	0.27 0.24 0.20 0.21	0.78 0.73 0.64 0.43	0.95 0.78 0.72 0.61	1.13 0.82 0.86 0.85
<p>The first episode scored ratings well below the original miniseries, and it hasn't picked up in last couple of weeks. It still performs fairly well among women 18-49, and may be affected by airing on a night with lower TV usage this time around. That being said, USA's Monk and Psych air on Fridays and perform quite well.</p>						
VH1						
ROL: Charm School Sun 9-10 (return 10/12)	10/12 10/19 10/26 11/2	1.64 1.02 1.10 1.02	1.68 0.76 0.97 0.80	1.71 0.96 1.22 0.88	1.21 0.77 0.91 0.75	0.87 0.60 0.60 0.63
<p>It seems that VH1's "celeb-reality" series are an endless source of spin offs, and this is no exception. There has been some fluctuation from week to week, but results have generally been good for the network's A18-34 target.</p>						