

# Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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## Lifestyle? Guess You Can Call It That...

What's harder than buying a new house, renovating a kitchen on a tight budget or cooking steak at the perfect temperature? Apparently, it's defining 'lifestyle programming.' The term is changing shape faster than a house on "Extreme Makeover," and its slippery nature is clear evidence of the category's dynamism. Once exclusively used in reference to cooking shows, fashion spots and visual travel guides, lifestyle has now become the Swiss Army knife of the programming world as scripted series gain glory by the season.

And while the lifestyle category is increasingly nuanced and certainly not for everyone (**A&E** is phasing out its Saturday morning lifestyle block, and **Turner** nixed digital lifestyle platform Upwave in May), it could hold huge potential for adaptation in the face of industry change, with many cable nets experimenting with how to use it to their best advantage. Among them **CNN**, **TLC** and **Animal Planet**, 3 nets that are remodeling the conventional understanding of the category to fit their specific brands. But for others like **Scripps Networks Interactive**, new kid **Esquire Network** and **Hallmark Channel**, classic lifestyle programming suits their audiences best.

What's so great about lifestyle? A lot, apparently. As **HGTV's** 20th anniversary approaches in Dec, parent net and lifestyle leader Scripps doesn't feel pressure to do anything else. "What it goes back to for us is relatability," said Scripps pres *Burton Jablin*. "Our subjects within lifestyle are ones that are very, very personal. Lifestyle and our version of it in particular will remain popular because of that. We're always going to be what we are. It's not what we do."

Scripps has built an entire business around lifestyle content, breaking the wide range of topics into 6 cable channels: **HGTV**, **DIY Network**, **Food Network**, **Cooking Channel**, **Travel Channel** and **Great American Country**. The company's big programming mission is "to provide information, ideas and inspiration on home and garden topics in a way that enhances the lives of our viewers and respects their intelligence." This boils down to what Scripps execs call "the three i's"— information, ideas and inspiration.

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When considering a new program, Jablin said Scripps is a stickler for authenticity, positivity and relatability. If a show is headed for HGTV or DIY, it must have more than just a little to do with home and landscape. Vying for Travel Channel? The central theme should focus on getting to know people, places and cultures around the world.

The audience must relate to the content, and the hosts must seem like familiar, approachable characters who really know their stuff. Most importantly, though, the show requires an “upbeat, optimistic view of the world,” because according to Jablin, that’s what sets Scripps’ lifestyle brand apart from others dabbling in the space. “We stay true to our subject matter—the audience knows what they’re going to get,” said Jablin. “They’re going to be delighted and entertained and inspired by our content, and it’s going to be within a very clear range at any of our networks.”

The company’s lifestyle content also exists off linear in a variety of forms. In addition to a long list of consumer products inspired by their network brands (including Food Network kitchenware, **Hearst**-backed print publications and a line of **Sherwin-Williams**

paints for HGTV) Scripps launched digital content platform, **uLive**, as a means of distributing video content and increasing reach. “The primary aim of uLive is to reach consumers where they are,” said Jablin. “We’re using digital to focus on our key job, which is to get more people to watch our video more

often.” It seems to be paying off: more than 170mln people interact with Scripps’ brands online each month, a stat that speaks to the engaging nature of lifestyle content and the consumption habits of viewers who continue to “do what they view.” To that end, Scripps is betting on TV Everywhere playing a much bigger role in the near future as

the company explores ways to create more customizable consumption experiences.

In contrast, Hallmark Channel attacks lifestyle programming by investing heavily in a single show. Emmy-nominated, 2-hour daytime talk show “Home & Family” airs 44 weeks a year, with **Crown Media Family Nets** pres/CEO **Bill Abbott** predicting even more growth in the coming year. “We’ve taken the approach that Home & Family is a destination in and of itself within our channel,” he said. “For us, in a crowded landscape, establishing those points of



*Brothers Drew and Jonathan Scott, hosts of HGTV’s “Property Brothers.”*



difference is a winning formula. I wouldn't think we would change strategy."

Even so, "Home & Family" is an evolutionary phenom in its own right. The show blends traditional aspects of the classic lifestyle show format most commonly seen on broadcast programs into a single program for cable. "It's not exclusively a how-to show, though there are a number of how-to elements. It's not exclusively an information show about travel and finance, but it includes all of those elements

to really be a potpourri of topics that might be quote-unquote, "lifestyle," said Abbott.

Making a lifestyle show like "Home & Family" embodies a category expansion that fits well adjacent the network's pre-existing content, he said: "It fits with our brand. Not everybody can produce a show and have a title like Home and Family on their network, and have it make sense."

**The Men's Section**

Esquire Network launched in Sept 2013 with every intention of building its foundation on lifestyle content in much the same way its namesake and strategic partner, *Esquire* magazine had. The net already had its work cut out for it as it rebranded from Style Network, a channel that had focused mainly on fashion and attracted viewers that were 80% female.



Owners of a UK brewery, James Watt and Martin Dickie, host Esquire Network's "Brew Dogs."

Using the publication's heritage as its spring board, the newly imagined net moved to target educated, upwardly mobile, metropolitan men with a female-friendly flair.

"Our specific offering is aimed squarely at an audience that is potentially under-served, and we're trying to speak to them and engage them with a unique blend of original programming that reflects the interests and passions of men today," said Esquire pres Adam Stotsky. "We're focused on creating a decidedly masculine experience, but it's important for us to create an environment in which women feel welcome."

And welcome they are: the net now attracts an audience that is 60-65% male, which Stotsky attributes to the idea that making lifestyle content for men isn't much different from making it for women as the differences lie largely in what's inside the box, not

necessarily the packaging. “The biggest points of difference are what relates to men and what interests them,” he said. “We basically say, is this something two guys might talk about over a beer.”

Esquire’s original programming is up to 16 shows and includes “Brew Dogs,” a character-driven series in which two brew masters travel the country brewing beer inspired by local cultures, and “The Getaway,” a travel show led by select celebrities who take viewers to their fave vacation spots. There’s also shows that feel undoubtedly Esquire like “Women We Love” and “How I Rock It.” For less, Esquire-ey content, the net looks to parent company NBCU for shows like comedy “Parks and Recreation” and “American Ninja Warrior,” which is produced by the net in partnership with NBC.

And while a lot younger than Scripps, Esquire also fully embraces the lifestyle genre. “For us... the entire experience, the whole brand, is defined as a lifestyle network,” said Stotsky. “That for us is almost a never-ending potential spectrum of storytelling.”

### Flipping Lifestyle

Meanwhile, some nets are taking the initiative to re-hash the lifestyle category into something that works for their specific audiences. CNN, for example, took the plunge into lifestyle when it launched CNN Original Series, a collection of new original programming that svp of talent and content development Amy Entelis described as a response to audiences that were drifting away between breaking news stories.



**Tony sits down to a serving of Bon Bot Loc in a season 4 episode of “Anthony Bourdain Parts Unknown” shot in Vietnam.**

“We wanted to give them compelling reasons to stick around,” she said. Described as “bringing nonfiction stories to the viewer in multi-part series,” the extension’s crown jewel became “Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown.” An hour-long travel and food show that debuted as the first CNN original in April 2013 and since then has won 3 Primetime Emmys.

But even with a former Travel Channel personality at the helm, CNN is reluctant to call the show lifestyle per se, opting for “a nonfiction show that uses food as an entry point.” A “travel, food, culture, history, politics and issue show wrapped into one,” said Entelis.

In addition to critical acclaim, adding lifestyle-esque content has also roped in new viewers for CNN as

## What is lifestyle?

A loose-fitting, but loaded term, lifestyle encompasses a lot of content these days, and every net has their own unique way of defining it. Check out how voices in this article see lifestyle at their home nets.

### ► Scripps Nets Interactive

“Our mission is to deliver information, ideas and inspiration on home, food and travel in a way that enhances the lives of our viewers and respects their intelligence.”

- Burton Jablin, President

### ► TLC

“Lifestyle as a means of defining a genre is a bit of an antiquated term. We are firmly rooted in those genres and they aren’t going away but as a broad, network mandate it is not lifestyle programming.”

- Nancy Daniels, GM

### ► Esquire

“That’s a really wide-ranging spectrum. It’s food and drink, it’s travel and adventure. It’s fashion and style. It’s relationships. It’s parenting, and cars, and gadgets, and sports stories... Really anything. The things that guys are passionate about.”

- Adam Stotsky, President

### ► Hallmark

“Everything that makes people’s lives better and allows them to either celebrate life’s moments. Including the typical how to do things that make your life easier or enrich it in some way.”

- Bill Abbott, President/CEO



“Parts Unknown” is the net’s top rated regularly scheduled program in the P25-40 demo. “The audience for Anthony Bourdain is younger than the average CNN audience,” said Entelis. “Ratings show that people are coming to CNN for that program.”

Animal Planet joins CNN in its use of lifestyle-like programming to move in new directions. Keeping in line with its tagline “Surprisingly Human,” Animal Planet injected a bit of humanity with “build shows” that straddle the fence between lifestyle and reality. The shows’ topics are designed to appeal to an animal-lover with a penchant for nature. “We’ve seen a trend of viewers wanting to disconnect from their digital lifestyles and experience the wild and natural world,” said Animal Planet GM *Rick Holzman*. “Animal Planet aims to serve that very human instinct.”

The shows in the net’s portfolio that might seem to fall in the lifestyle category—“Treehouse Masters,” “Redwood Kings,” “Tanked,” and “The Pool Master”—“celebrate the intersection of man and the great outdoors,” said Holzman. But they also rely heavily on character-driven storylines while promoting an “animal-centric life,” he said.

For TLC, lifestyle is still very much present, albeit perhaps less recognizable than it once was. When asked about what they’re doing in the space, gm *Nancy Daniels* explained that “I feel like we have kind of moved on from and evolved the genre a bit.” The net’s more traditional lifestyle focus in the heyday of shows like “While You Were Out” and “Moving Up” has given way to shows that increasingly focus more on a trendy, burgeoning genre Daniels calls “subculture.”

“If you look at shows like ‘Sister Wives’ or ‘Mob Wives,’ those people are certainly living a certain lifestyle that is fascinating and interesting to watch,” said Daniels. “Of course that’s completely redefining the term of what lifestyle is, but that’s more how we look at a lot our current programming.”

But moving to subculture doesn’t necessarily mean forgoing all of lifestyle’s trademark features.



**Fashion expert, Randy Fenoli consults a bride in season 12 of TLC’s “Say Yes to the Dress.”**

The net’s popular wedding shows such as “Say Yes To The Dress” and “Something Borrowed, Something New” could easily be considered subcultures of the lifestyle category, as they display all the familiar ingredients. “There are some things in there that are a part of a lot of these shows... a little bit of eye candy, a little bit of how-to, a little bit of education about what kinds of dresses are out there,” said Daniels. “As a viewer, you’re watching it for the entertainment factor, but at the same time you’re kind of learning about what is fashion-forward right now.”

Overall, TLC’s current take on the genre is evidence of programmers adapting to new audiences by making changes to preexisting formulas. And in this case, that meant subtracting the viewer and putting greater focus on the people involved. “The shift to it being about the person’s experience and journey through is kind of the more modern way and maybe even more TLC way of doing things,” said Daniels.

And that may be, but as cable nets chase the scripted wave, those nets that stick to traditional lifestyle programming re-

mind us that our industry is not immune to fads. While one content type or genre may be in vogue today, it’s often only a matter of time before attention turns to something else. Delivering uniform programming year after year creates solid, steady ratings that may not produce mass social fanfare but definitely appeal to long-term advertisers. Sticking to one’s (nail) guns is a challenge that Jablin identifies as the key to sustainable success in any genre, including lifestyle. “TV is highly cyclical of what’s in the moment and chasing the what’s new,” said Jablin. “The most challenging thing is staying focused and having the confidence to stay true to your subject matter.”

In the end, lifestyle programming is a bit of a chameleon. It has a way of shaping itself to each audience’s wants and needs, always working backwards from the brand to feed the many interests and passions that color all of our hobbies and interests. We wouldn’t have it any other way.

- Ashley Powell