

Holiday Special Report

Cablefax Daily™

Monday — November 3, 2014

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 24 / No. SPECIAL

ADVERTISEMENT

NOBODY CELEBRATES THE HOLIDAYS LIKE HALLMARK

This November and December, Hallmark Channel and Hallmark Movies & Mysteries will deliver 2,600+ hours of non-stop holiday programming with no duplication between networks.

CrownMedia

FAMILY NETWORKS

Countdown to Christmas

Hallmark CHANNEL
The Heart of TV



Hallmark Channel is the Most Watched Cable Network in November & December!

Nielsen (11/2-12/22/13), Sat-Sun 8p-11p, L+SD total viewers (P2+) impressions. Subject to qualifications upon request.



MOST WONDERFUL
MOVIES
OF CHRISTMAS

CONNECT WITH
HALLMARK HOLIDAY CLASSICS
AND NEW PREMIERES
ALL SEASON LONG

Hallmark
MOVIES & MYSTERIES

Cablefax Daily™

Monday — November 3, 2014

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 24 / No. SPECIAL

For Some, It's Christmas All Year

It is a warm evening in July, the Sun is slowly descending over Los Angeles and a large contingent of the nation's television critics and reporters have left their weeks-long **TCA** encampment at the Beverly Hilton for an evening 'activity' at a gorgeous, mountaintop mansion in Bel Air with a view of the Hollywood Hills that the word breathtaking only begins to describe. Adjoining the first floor, where a marble expanse surrounds a glistening indoor pool, is a massive lawn with dinner tables tastefully overflowing with flowers, candles, wine and elaborate place settings. Dodging between waiters and guests is a parade of veteran actors, including *Alan Thicke*, *Morgan Fairchild*, *Jon Voigt* and *Andie MacDowell*.

Yet something at this party of dreams seems off. The evening's hosts, **Hallmark Channel** and Hallmark Movie Channel (now **Hallmark Movies & Mysteries**), have invited the TV scribes here to celebrate... Christmas? Didn't we just do July 4th? Yes, sprinkled throughout are symbols of a holiday some 5 months out. Carolers, dressed in Dickensian costumes, sing and ring bells. At a photo booth, guests grab large, Styrofoam snowflakes and adorn themselves with woolen mittens, mufflers and caps

before pictures are snapped. Over there is Santa's sleigh, dead center on the lawn is a 60-foot-high Christmas tree, perfectly trimmed.

While Hallmark's 'Christmas in July' party was a fun stunt, its underlying rationale is serious: For networks like Hallmark, **ABC Family**, **UP** and others, the holiday season is big business and has become a year-round activity. While some of us have visions of sugar-plums dancing in our heads the evening of Dec 24, it's a regular nightly occurrence for content execs at these networks. "We're constantly in the market for great holiday stories," UP's programming svp *Sophia Kelley* said. Hallmark's programming and publicity svp *Michelle Vicary* added, "Christmas is 12 months a year for us. We're working on scripts all the time and frequently filming holiday movies in the summer. We make a lot of artificial snow." Celebrating its 17th season, "25 Days of Christmas" on ABC Family "is easily our highest-rated period of the year," evp, strategy & programming *Saalam Coleman Smith* said, noting during 25 Days last year the net was basic cable's #1 in W18-49, W25-54, W18-34, F12-34, P18-34 and P12-34. The stunt drew 100mln viewers and roughly twice as many as any other month.

Countdown to Christmas


Hallmark
CHANNEL
The Heart of TV



On November 30, the Hallmark Hall of Fame Moves from Broadcast to Hallmark Channel for the First Time in Over 60 Years with the New Premiere of

One Christmas Eve



TURKEY TROT NO MORE: FULL SPEED AHEAD

But what of the unwritten rule that merchants eschew holiday decorations and music until after Thanksgiving? “That’s gone by the wayside,” said **Crown Media** president/CEO *Bill Abbott*, who heads Hallmark Channel and Hallmark Movies & Mysteries. Indeed, in some malls this year, Black Friday will begin before dinnertime on Thanksgiving Thursday, the implication being that Real Shoppers gobble their turkey at lunch and are shopping by dinnertime. Similarly, waiting until November to kick off holiday programming is for amateurs. Hallmark Channel primed the Christmas pump in July. In concert with parent Hallmark’s annual Christmas Ornament Preview Weekend in its 3,000 Gold Crown stores, Hallmark ran Christmas films in July as part of a “Christmas Keepsake Weekend” stunt. Ratings jumped 40% vs the same period the year before. In August, the season finale of ABC Family’s “Pretty Little Liars” series got a head start on seasonal programming. While the episode dealt with Thanksgiving, one character went all out, outfitting a home with Christmas decorations [see photo]. It served as a teaser for the fan-driven series’ Christmas special months in advance.

Closer to the holidays, Hallmark kicked off its “Countdown to Christmas” programming stunt this past Friday evening, the last day of October, the earliest start in its 13-year history. It will deliver 2600+ hours of holiday fare, including 14 originals each weekend over its two networks, making Hallmark’s slate its largest to date. Ditto for UP’s 500+-hours holiday stunt, “Everything You Love About Christmas,” which the Atlanta-based network began yesterday, Nov 2. Even ABC Family, whose 25 Days of Christmas title would seem to lock in its start date, will get a jump on Dec 25



DECKIN’ THE HALLS: ABC Family got a headstart on the Christmas spirit with ‘Pretty Little Liars’ Season 5 finale in August, with Emily (Shay Mitchell-right) going all out with Christmas decorations and a shirt that describes how her character and the net feel about the holiday.

with “Countdown to 25 Days of Christmas,” starting Nov 23. This week-long stunt features a slew of extremely popular holiday and non-holiday films designed to go beyond ABC Family’s millennial demo and encourage family viewing. Titles include “The Hunger Games,” “Elf,” “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation,” “Finding Nemo,” “Dark Shadows” and versions of Cinderella.

DIFFERENT PATHS TO DECEMBER 25

For Hallmark Networks’ chief Abbott, one of the hooks of this special report—that Hallmark rolled out its holiday slate earlier than ever this year—is a technicality only. The network traditionally begins holiday programming the Friday night before the first weekend in November. With Nov 1 falling on a Saturday this year, it started festivities last Friday, Oct 31, one day earlier than in 2013. Far more important, Abbott said, is that this year’s holiday programming marks the start of the channels’ full collaboration with parent Hallmark and its venerated retail brand. Yet to be fully finalized or announced, the cross-promotion strategy will encompass marketing opportunities during various holidays, combining the reach of the TV networks with Hallmark’s retail properties. It will significantly change Hallmark’s cable business, Abbott promised. The hope is that by emphasizing other holidays and events, the percentage of Christmas revenue, which represents roughly one-third of Hallmark Cards’ business today, will fall a bit.

The first piece of that strategy can be seen in Countdown to Christmas. “We’ve really tried to tie the channels’ calendar with the retail calendar so we’re promoting the stores and they promote back to the channel,” he said. “That’s our secret sauce for our success at the holiday.

We produce great content, but a lot of other people do, too. But... there's only one Hallmark brand and only one brand with 3,000 Gold Crown retail store opportunities."

An example of the collaboration is this year's Hallmark Channel original film "Northpole" (premiering Nov 15, 8p, starring *Tiffani Thiessen* and *Bailee Madison*, with *Robert Wagner* and *Jill St. John* as Mr. and Mrs. Claus). It's the first co-production of Hallmark Cards and Hallmark Channel. Beyond the film, however, there will be Northpole merchandise

and signage in Gold Crown stores promoting the film and Countdown to Christmas. In addition, there will be signage and merchandise at Hallmark partners **Walmart**, **Walgreens** and **CVS**, as well as other retailers, Abbott says. The collaboration will last. Work is underway on "Northpole II" for 2015 and a 2016 Valentine's Day movie. Last year, Hallmark Channel's 12 original films averaged 3.3 HH, up 27% over 2012, pushing it to #1 among HHs, W25-54 and total viewer rating for weekend prime time.

Also new this year will be an emphasis on creating a distinct viewer experience for each of the two channels. For the first time, Hallmark Channel and Hallmark Movies & Mysteries will each go 24-7 with holiday programming, including Hallmark Channel's daily "Home and Family" show. But the two channels will carry different kinds of holiday programming, Vicary says. Hallmark Channel will feature lighter holiday entertainment, spirit-of-the-season fare. Heavier holiday dramas, like those seen on The Hallmark Hall of Fame, will reside at Movies & Mysteries. An exception to the light-fare rule will come Nov 30, at 8pm, when Hallmark Hall of Fame's "One Christmas Eve," starring *Anne Heche*, premieres exclusively on Hallmark Channel. The 62-year-old Hall of Fame franchise previously premiered its productions on broadcast channels and PBS. The deal uniting Hall of Fame and its 81 Emmys with Hallmark Channel was announced last month.

Despite its name and emphasis on holiday themes like family, humor, love, kindness and giving, many of UP's stories include a realistic edge that you might not expect

from the programmer. "We're not a one-note network... not everything is joyful and wonderful," UP's Kelley said. "Some of our stories include tears... there are a lot of families suffering out there, and that's part of the holiday, too," she says. Still, "there's always hope at Christmas" and UP's realistic dramas always include inspirational elements. "You'll have tears, sure, but also tears of joy," she promised.

One such story is an UP original called "Paper Angels" (Nov 16, 7p ET), which revolves around a one-parent family that must move to

a new town to avoid an abusive, alcoholic father. Starring *Josie Bisset* as a single parent, Paper's plot shows how love and acts of kindness can make a bad situation better. In the film, a newly married couple (*Matthew Settle* and *Kendra Anderson*) that is experiencing problems decides to forgo exchanging Christmas presents and instead sends gifts to children in need through a Salvation Army program. One of their gifts



NOT A SELFIE, AN ELFIE: *Bailee Madison* (right) plays a magical elf (is there another kind?) and *Max Charles* is the child of a skeptical journalist (is there another kind?) in "Northpole," the first co-prod of Hallmark Channel and Hallmark Cards.

makes a big difference to Bisset's character's son, who was bullied by his father. The storyline is adapted from a song and novel by singer *Jimmy Wayne* called "Paper Angels."

For ABC Family, this year marks the first time several of its scripted series and comedies will have special holiday eps during 25 Days, Coleman Smith says. The extra effort seems worthwhile. In Sept, ABC Family posted a "100 Days till Christmas" countdown graphic on **Facebook**, which was shared nearly 250K times, becoming its most-popular posting. That is until an Oct 13 posting detailing its 25 Days of Christmas schedule of more than 300 hours of programming. That post has more than 300mln shares and growing.

After 17 years, you'd assume 25 Days might become formulaic. Not so, Coleman Smith insists. "We approach each year differently, based on the titles we have available," she said, noting the weekends are key because that is where "our key holiday titles" are scheduled "so families can watch together." The net is "always focused on... our core millennial audience," she says, "but 25 Days creates an opportunity to bring in a wider audience who enjoy watching our tent pole movies together as well as allow them to sample our original series."