

Special Report – Summer Programming Strategies

Cablefax Daily™

Wednesday — June 24, 2015

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 26 / No. SPECIAL

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Programmers See Summer Gold As TV Offers Sunny Disposition

By Cathy Applefeld Olson

Ahhh summer. The lapping of the waves. The sizzling of the grill. The magnetic pull of the television.

While viewership tends to dip as the thermometer rises, savvy programmers are increasingly populating the season with content and promos aimed at gathering viewers around the small screen like ants at a picnic. Read on to learn about some of this summer's hottest offerings—no sunscreen required.

Warming Trend

For some time now, summer has been shedding its fallow-TV-season status, particularly in the cable realm. While the season used to be “competitively more quiet, it’s gotten louder because our competitors are seeing more summer opportunities,” says **MTV** evp, marketing *Tina Exarhos*. “And if more people are watching TV, it’s good for everybody. There’s more reason to flip around the channels.”

Of course, smart nets are looking to capitalize on every summer angle. “While there is less viewing during the summer months, cable historically has been stronger in summer. It’s still a little less competitive, so we view that as an opportunity,” says **Crown Media Family Networks** pres/CEO *Bill Abbott*, whose **Hallmark Channels** handily branded ratings winner *Christmas in July* in 2012 as a way to keep viewers in the spirit year-round. This year Hallmark is super-sizing its holiday cheer with *Keepsake Christmas* content airing July 3-12 to coincide with the launch of this year’s Hallmark Keepsake ornament collection.

Keepsake Christmas features the premiere of the first-ever Hallmark original Christmas in July movie, “*Family for Christmas*,” starring *Lacey Chabert* and premiering on July 11. “There’s such a huge appetite for original movies, especially at the holidays, so it reinforces our messaging around *Keepsake Christmas* and our summer Christmas event to have original content in there,” Abbott says.

The event also returns a new “*Paw Star Games*” July 12, and will feature previously aired original holiday movies including “*Christmas Under Wraps*,” “*Debbie Macomber’s Mrs. Miracle*” and “*A Royal Christmas*.”

Celebrating Original Content
All Year Long
with Returning Favorites

Cedar Cove

Season 3 Premiere July 18 8/7c



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Holiday fare airs 11am-11pm weekends, 2pm-10pm weekdays. The network is bookending its cold-weather fare with the return of June Weddings programming this month and a back-to-school programming event around Labor Day, which will segue back into Countdown to Christmas content in the fall.

In addition and for the first time, **Hallmark Movies & Mysteries** is also getting into the Christmas spirit during the summer with holiday movies “that celebrate the more dramatic side of the brand,” Abbott says. The network’s Gold Crown Christmas promo, which also runs July 3-12, will showcase classics from the Hallmark Hall of Fame library and a collection of holiday family films.

Speaking of drama, **Turner Classic Movies** is already deep into the second year of its “Summer of Darkness” programming event, which brings 24 hours of noir films every Friday in June and July. The network is enhancing the movie experience this year with a free nine-week online course that probes the means, motives and opportunities that led Hollywood studios to make these hard-boiled crime dramas.

Summer Is As Summer Does

On the other side of the coin, summer offers the perfect opportunity to stack up programming that goes hand-in-hand with sun and surf. It’s no coincidence Shark Week surfaces during the beachiest months of the year. **Discovery Channel’s** perennial ratings beast is getting even meatier this year, with 19 hours of new primetime content (the most in its 28-year history), an earlier in the season debut (July 5-12) and an additional weekend of themed programming in August.

“Sharks have such a hold on our collective imagination,” says *Howard Swartz*, Discovery’s vp, documen-

taries and specials. “We want to inspire people to care about sharks and educate them, and what better time to do that than when people have a closer proximity to sharks? More people are at the beach, more people are in the water.”

Among a multitude of baited-breath moments to come this year, Swartz hints, “We were off the coast of Guadalupe this year. They went there to find out, ‘Is this where the biggest mature females tend to go?’ I’ll just say we filmed if not the biggest, one of the biggest there is.”

Similarly, summer offers boundless opportunity for the calendar-conscious **Scripps Interactive Networks**. As *Allison Page*, gm of Scripps’ home category including **HGTV**, **DIY Network** and **GAC** puts it, “We’re basically bringing viewers inside to celebrate what they love outside.” Although Page says viewers love to celebrate hot spots during both warm- and cold-weather months, the vicarious beach-goer led the network to amp up in-season summer content.

“We noticed some trends. With certain episodes of ‘House Hunters’—which obviously cover a huge variety of [locales]—some of the episodes that featured locations near the beach were particularly highly rated,” she says. This led to new summer entries including HGTV’s “Beach Flip,” which premieres July 5, and “Treehouse Guys” and “Lake Life” on DIY.

Food Network is launching an unprecedented 11 new primetime series this summer, including *Michel Symon*-hosted “Burgers, Brew & Que,” “Chopped Grill Masters,” *Alton Brown*-hosted “Camp Cutthroat Kitchen,” and a series tentatively titled “Carnival Fare,” hosted by “Black-ish” leading man *Anthony Anderson*.

“Summer is a big opportunity for us; people are



COMPELLING CONTENT.
 STRONG RATINGS.

CABLE'S NEW HOME FOR SOUGHT AFTER DRAMAS AND MYSTERIES.

really excited about food and vacationing,” the network’s gm/svp and on-air personality *Bob Tuschman* tells **CFX**. “We try to create appointment viewing at the end of the day so it feels like an extension of the summer fun they are having,”

Tuschman also points to a growing trend in summer programming. “We’re very conscious about creating things that are family-friendly. With the kids out of school, we want to create a destination kids can happily watch with their parents.” As such, summer newbies also include “*Rachael Ray’s Kids Cook-Off*,” the evolution of last year’s kids competition featuring *Ray* and *Guy Fieri*, and “*Chopped Teen Tournament*.”

At **Travel Channel**, “much the way the movie industry does popcorn blockbusters in the summer and more serious Oscar fare in the winter, we generally do fun eye candy in the summer months, and in colder months we have a more serious programming,” says Travel svp, programming *Ross Babbit*.

Travel is focusing on unleashing new seasons for an array of returning series, plus new primetime additions including “101 Amazing Thrills” and “Epic Attractions.”

Dude, Pass the Remote

For some networks, particularly those targeting the younger set, summer offers something no amount of marketing can buy: free time.

“The MTV audience is generally more available in the summer, so it’s been our strategy to have fresh episodes of our biggest shows in summertime,” says Exarhos. “We’ve for a long time been told that there’s a fall season. But that’s not the way people watch television, certainly not the way younger people watch television, so the summer’s been a big play for us.”

MTV chose summertime to launch its televised treatment of horror film franchise “*Scream*.” The series will bow on June 30, preceded by a slew of promotional fanfare including an over-the-top promo that featured 12 stars from the network’s series including “*Teen Wolf*” and “*Finding Carter*” appear on-air as bloodied corpses.

The end of the school year also has become a traditional launch window for **ABC Family**, with a new season of “*Pretty Little Liars*” leading the charge toward eagerly awaiting fans.

“We have a habit built up of focusing a lot of our big releases around the summertime,” says *Nigel Cox-Hagan*, ABC Family’s svp, marketing, creative & branding. “It’s often when we release our most provocative and compelling new material.”

This summer the net is piggybacking new procedural series “*Stitchers*” with “*PLL*.” Up next is the unscripted “*Becoming Us*,” about teenager whose father is transitioning into a woman.

“For us, the fact that young people have more pockets of time during the summer is an opportunity. They need something to fill their time, and we are happy to provide compelling entertainment,” he says.

Being An Original

As the cable summer heats up, one thing’s for certain across networks and target demographics: the value of airing originals cannot be overstated.

As well as returning pop culture frenzy “*Sharknado*” for a third year on July 22 with new havoc-wreaking and a slew of new guest cast members, **Syfy** is broadening the franchise with an entire *Sharknado* week, July 18-25, to include seven original movies. The network is also premiering three new series this summer, including “*Dark Matter*” and “*Killjoys*,” and bringing back new seasons of several others.

The “**E!** Summer Here” programming lineup packs new series including “*Hollywood Cycle*,” “*Sex With Brody*,” “*Stewarts & Hamiltons*,” “*I Am Cait*,” “*The Comment Section*” and “*WAGS*.” The network is also rolling out new seasons of returning series, “*Botched*” and “*Total Divas*” among them.

ABC Family elected to launch a widespread sampling program this summer to provide viewers a taste of its new original fare. premiere dates. The strategy includes exclusive digital premieres on sites including **EW.com**, **Facebook** and **Tumblr**, screening events and previews of full episodes on the WATCH ABC Family app, VOD and a designated ABC Family website.

“We’ve launched shows in summer before but never this many shows across this many formats,” says Cox-Hagan. “It created the opportunity to eventize the entire summer.”

Among other benefits, airing original fare in summertime can provide alternative viewing models. “Whenever we put original content on it’s consumed a little differently with DVR and VOD,” Hallmark’s *Abbott* says of Christmas in July. “We get a big lift off of those platforms, yet at the same time on our channels that holiday feel changes the behavior. Viewers are there for the holiday; they are not there for that binge-viewing. They’re in the mood for a Hallmark movie they can sit down and watch, know what they’re going to get, and then get back to what they were doing.”