

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Pop Upfront: Network Steps Up Content Ambitions

Plenty of networks are rebranding these days, but one of the biggest overhauls in recent years was TV Guide Channel's transformation from a utilitarian network to **Pop**. And even that makeover continues to be an evolution. When it debuted as Pop in 2015, it was primarily reality programming targeting mega fans—those same viewers who had turned to the channel over the years for Red Carpet coverage at awards shows. But the channel, a JV between **CBS** and **Lionsgate**, has since become a deep well for scripted programming—evidenced by Thursday's slate of upfront announcements. The channel has acquired the rights to popular **ABC** sitcom "The Goldbergs" (to premiere in 4Q) while adding its own scripted fare such as half-hour comedy "Hot Date," based on CollegeHumor's online series of the same name, and "Swedish Dicks, Private Investigators," a comedy about an aging ex-stuntman stuck in the past and an overly optimistic Swedish DJ stuck in the digital world who solve cases together. Part of what helped Pop take the scripted plunge is the success of "Schitt's Creek." "It pushed us into this premium programming place," said Pop pres *Brad Schwartz*. "We're working with really amazing people in front of and behind the camera." Hot Date has *Will Arnett's* production company behind it. In development is a series written by *Barry Safchik* and *Michael Platt* ("Grace and Frankie," "Weeds"). Pop followed Schitt's Creek starring *Eugene Levy* with *Ali Wentworth*-led "Nightcap," a comedy poking fun at late night TV that's received positive buzz. The message Pop pushed at its presentation is that Pop has become synonymous with premium programming. It's taking that approach even with acquisitions. No other network or SVOD service has episodes of "ER," and it snagged The Goldbergs in its first window, fresh off network. The programming push has it gaining momentum in ratings, with the net touting that broadcast season over season viewership among A18-49 is +21% and W25-54 is +13%. "For adults 18-49, full broadcast year, we were the 5th fastest growing network in all of entertainment television (takeaway news, sports and kids)," said Schwartz. Pop hasn't abandoned nonfiction programming. Series in development include "You Take My Point," a pop culture panel hosted from *Mary McCormack's* living room developed in partnership with *Rashida Jones* ("Parks and Recreation") and *Matador* ("Lip Sync Battle"), and "Get in my Van," a talk-travel show hosted by *Kate Walsh* ("Grey's Anatomy") and her best friend as they travel the country in an RV. For this upfront season, it's worth noting the net added 58 new national advertisers in the most recent broadcast season and more than 140 since the rebrand. Pop's message for advertisers is similar to its pitch to distributors: "Because we're still a growing network and because we're still coming off where we were two years ago, you have access to all of this stuff at cheaper prices," Schwartz said.

Charter-Fox: Yes, the suspense has lasted all week as **Fox's** website *keepmynets.com* fastidiously updated its "Attention Charter Spectrum Customers" message as the two companies' current deal kept getting extended day by day. As

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of presstime Friday, the site read “You may lose your favorite shows and sports today, Friday, April 14” and listed logos for **FX Networks**, **National Geographic Channels**, **Fox Sports** and **Fox Deportes**, along with a number of regional sports nets. No telling what’s in store for the holiday weekend, but the game continues...

NBCU OTT: After months of negotiations, **NBC** and the NBC Television Affiliates Board announced today a deal to opt in to **NBCUniversal’s** carriage agreements with OTT players, as well as gain TV Everywhere distribution rights for pay TV subscribers. “We are happy to once again reinforce NBC’s commitment to and recognition of the value of the affiliate partnership and that of local broadcasters. This agreement in the digital space reaffirms that commitment,” said NBC Affiliate Relations president *Jean Dietze*. NBC Affiliates chmn *Ralph Oakley* said OTT “can play an important role in ensuring the growth and development of local, network-affiliated television.”

Programming: **AMC** has renewed “Fear the Walking Dead” for a fourth season, even before its Season 3 premiere on June 4. In addition, *Andrew Chambliss* and *Ian Goldberg* (“Once Upon a Time”) are boarding Fear as co-showrunners, starting with season four. Additionally, *Scott M. Gimple*, executive producer and showrunner of “The Walking Dead,” will become an executive producer of Fear. AMC previously announced that Fear showrunner *Dave Erickson* would transition off the show after Season 3 to develop new products for **AMC Studios**. -- **Nat Geo’s** global anthology series “Breakthrough” will return for a second season on May 2, following a new ep of *Albert Einstein* bio-series “Genius.” Breakthrough shines a light on the world’s leading scientists and their cutting-edge innovations and advancements. -- **Smithsonian Channel** on Easter Sunday, April 16, was set to premiere “The Real Jesus of Nazareth” in which “Jesus of Nazareth” original actor *Robert Powell* returns to the Holy Land to seek out clues about Jesus as an historical figure.

From the Rooftops: **SundanceTV** is joining **Rooftop Films** as the exclusive presenting and broadcast sponsor of the upcoming Rooftop Summer Series, the outdoor event for independent films that boasts more than 45,000 attendees during its annual summer run. Together, they will present more than 45 outdoor shows in and around New York City, with an average of three screenings per week.

OTT: Amazon is currently developing an animated children’s series with the working title “South Street Sounds” along with a live-action children’s series with Grammy Award winning hip-hop band, The Roots, who serve as the official house band on “The Tonight Show Starring *Jimmy Fallon*.” The series will feature music by The Roots and follow three friends growing up in the most musical of neighborhoods, where the birds tweet to a beat, every shop-keeper, pizza-maker and crossing guard dance perfectly in time, and having a bad day means literally singing the blues.

Prom Date: **TLC’s** “Say Yes to the Prom” on April 20 will make a splash at **Discovery Communications’** Global Corporate Headquarters in Silver Spring, MD, in an effort to wow 200 underserved and academically high achieving high school students. Students who participate will be treated to a day of free prom dress, tuxedo and accessory “shopping” alongside TLC’s *Monte Durham*.

TV Innovation Summit: Join us on June 8 in NYC. More speakers to be announced soon. And don’t forget to register before the early bird discount expires on April 21! www.cfxtvsummit.com



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