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What the Industry Reads First

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TCA Day One: HBO Contemplates Post-Merger Quality, Volume

HBO programming pres **Casey Bloys** spent some time at Wednesday's **TCA** exec session reassuring television critics that the **AT&T-Time Warner** merger won't affect the premium net's dedication to quality. "We're not going to do anything that we wouldn't do, that doesn't feel like what we would have done before," he said. "No one is asking to sacrifice quality for volume." Indeed, speculation that AT&T might turn the famously finicky HBO into a content factory with hundreds of shows started when **WarnerMedia** chief **John Stankey** suggested earlier this month that it will need to increase volume to compete. Stankey has since clarified that quality still matters, and Bloys reaffirmed that Wednesday. "Putting talent first, that is not gonna change," he said. "I believe we can do more quality programming, more of what we do. The question is how much more without losing that personal touch and that hands-on approach. So that's what we're in discussion [on] now. What's the right level for us with this increased funding?" Bloys said he doesn't want to compress development to meet a higher show quota. "I don't want to change anything about the process," he said. "We're careful in our development and careful in shows we select, and I don't want to change that. But, obviously, if we're doing more, we may need more staff. But I don't want to change our culture in any way. I don't want it to feel like a factory." Meanwhile, **Facebook Watch** made its first TCA appearance, telling critics that the social network's video channel seeks to create a new type of social content. **Ricky Van Veen**, Facebook's head of global creative strategy, said part of "creating conversations around content that people love" includes, for example, interacting with fictional characters' **Instagram** accounts in ways that affect the plot in future episodes. He and product vp **Fidji Simo** acknowledged that Watch isn't immune to controversies surrounding Facebook's efforts to police offensive content. "Sometimes there are difficult decisions," Simo said. "It's not always black and white. That's why we try to be transparent in how we make these decisions." With "constantly evolving" standards, she said the key is to "balance free expression with the safety of our users, and maintaining that balance is a complex thing." Some have questioned Facebook's policy of suppressing certain content it finds objectionable, including a warning when people try to share it. But she said there's "a big difference between what's allowed on Facebook and what gets distribution... We reduce the spread of it, which is what we see as the most negative aspect."



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