3 Simple Rules for Navigating Uncertain Times, According to 20+ TV and Video Experts

It’s one thing to live in interesting times. However, the main message at the 2025 IAB NewFronts Main Stage is that digital TV platforms and advertisers are currently living in *uncertain* times.

“Uncertainty has become a feature, not a bug,” IAB CEO David Cohen observed at the top of the day-long event, held at Convene 225 Liberty Street in New York on Wednesday. “Even in the most stable of times, certainty has been a little bit of a mirage. The future is never fully knowable.”

Much like Sarah Connor, though, the 20+ companies that graced the IAB stage chose to find hope in the unknown future rolling toward us all. Returning champs like Revry and Teads and first-timers like CheckedUp and Dr. Phil’s MeritTV embraced Cohen’s invitation to “stay open to change, new opportunities, and making great decisions.” (Find a full list of presenters here.)

Here are the three big takeaways for how the industry is forging a concrete path through uncertain terrain.

1. Show up and stay relevant

Here’s one thing you can be certain of: You’re guaranteed to miss the hundreds of millions of consumers you don’t try to reach. Ameneh Atai, Nielsen’s gm of audience measurement,

indicated as much when she cited data showing that 50% of brands aren’t mixing up their media investments enough to achieve a decent ROI.

Instead of going all-in on digital platforms, Atai suggested that advertisers scale their investments so they show up where audiences are across a range of media, from radio to social video. “Nuance in audience matters,” she emphasized. “Reliable data and solutions that allow you to do cross-platform planning and measurement matter, because they allow you to layer the nuance of the audience to better maximize all the business outcomes you’re looking to achieve.”

And once you’re on a mix of platforms, make sure that you’re showing up in a relevant way. “Consumers want ads that are relevant to their lives,” noted Kelly MacLean, vp of engineering, science, and product at Amazon Ads and Amazon DSP.

By way of example, MacLean brought on PepsiCo paid media director Drew Ingram to walk through a case study of its partnership on Lay’s Do Us a Flavor campaign that put precise audience targeting at its crunchy center. “We didn’t want to be targeting messages to people who aren’t responsive,” Ingram said.

Staying relevant also means staying attentive to audience moods. Wurl demonstrated how contextual ad placement is essential to complementing the viewer’s experience with streaming content instead of complicating it. To that end, the company developed BrandDiscovery, which uses generative AI to gauge the genre, brand safety, and emotion of a particular program and places ads accordingly in real time.

“When an ad appears in the right context, it becomes an extension of the story and experience,” said Pete Crofut, Wurl’s vp of business development, agencies, and brands. “We found the strongest correlation happens when the emotion of

the scene matches the actual advertising creative.”

2. Meet diverse audiences in diverse locations

It’s no secret that diversity, equity, and inclusion programs are under fire with a new administration in the White House. But the myriad colors and complexions on display in digital media presenters like LatiNation, Revry, My Code, and MediaCo remain a vital reflection of America’s vibrant multicultural society.

“The community here has been so welcoming of new voices,” Mirror Digital founder and CEO Sheila Marmon said, adding that the multicultural market is also a “growth market.” (Marmon went off-script during her presentation to note that she’s the first Black female founder to present on the IAB Main Stage.)

Speaking with ADWEEK between panels, Cohen suggested that the arc towards multicultural marketing will bend beyond the Oval Office’s current occupants.

“Regardless of whether it’s in favor or out of favor [politically], if the goal is to connect with consumers, I think we’re going to see continued support for that market,” he remarked.

Meanwhile, Main Stage presenters like ReachTV and CheckedUp spoke of the benefits of reaching diverse audiences in diverse out-of-home locations, something that Cohen said IAB members have been pushing the company to spotlight.

For example, ReachTV founder and CEO Lynnwood Bibbens spoke about how the network’s presence in airports nationwide puts its mixture of live sports, news, and original programming in the eyes and ears of millions of travelers every day. “You stay with consumers from the gate to baggage claim,” Bibbens said.

In its inaugural presentation, CheckedUp outlined how being

present in hospitals and doctors' offices gave brands access to captive audiences in a quiet setting. Speaking with ADWEEK later in the day, CCO Jim Decker said that while pharmaceutical companies are currently the platform's main advertisers, they see an opportunity to appeal to other brands.

"People are much more likely to pay attention, not just to very specific health care things, but *any* messaging," he noted. "I think it's important that brands who traditionally haven't focused on health care understand that it's not about health care—it's about the environment."

3. Make original content that's personal and personality-led

As media titans like Ted Sarandos have noted, the walls between video podcasts and talk shows—or, for that matter, social video and streaming video—are getting increasingly thin. And on digital platforms, they're practically non-existent. Multiple companies screened original programming sizzle reels featuring video versions of podcasts and radio shows.

Meanwhile, the programs that lacked visible mics and cans displayed some of the hallmarks of social-forward fare, including an emphasis on personal stories as well as personalities skilled at speaking confessionally to-camera.

CheckedUp currently has two originals that highlight real stories: Inside This Life, which interviews patients dealing with chronic conditions, and The Pulse: Real Talk, which passes the mic to doctors for conversations about the health care issues of the day.

"Inside This Life is really about hearing from the patients directly," CheckedUp's co-founder and CEO, Dr. Richard Awdeh, tells ADWEEK. "The Pulse is tackling how we've left the era of

evidence-based medicine. We’re now in the era of ‘I heard it on TikTok.’”

And, for the record, the personalities leading original content don’t have to be human. During its presentation, Future Today announced a partnership with Chuck E. Cheese that will include a new media network and video content starring the chain restaurant’s rodent mascot that will appear on the company’s HappyKids FAST platform.

“It’s another way for them to be in front of the consumers and highlight and showcase the experience families will get at the restaurants,” Future Today co-founder Vikrant Mathur tells ADWEEK. “For them, it’s about being top of mind, having another touchpoint with the consumer, and reinforcing the brand.”

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