ABC Will Stop Reporting Live-Plus-Same-Day Ratings

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4 hours ago
Following a Brandweek panel last week, ABC Entertainment president Karey Burke told Adweek that she was ready to move her network away from reporting live-plus-same-day ratings. Today, she made it official: ABC will no longer report that metric, except for live programming.

“This move aligns us with how we evaluate the comprehensive performance of our shows, how we monetize our business and how our audience chooses to consume our content,” Burke said in a note to staff. “People used to plan their lives around television, now they plan television around their lives.”

ABC will now focus first on live-plus-3 ratings, followed by live-plus-7 and then multiplatform-plus-35-day ratings.

This will make ABC the second broadcast network to stop reporting live-plus-same-day numbers. Fox ended the practice in 2015.

“As a broadcast network, our job is to captivate our audience and create a customer experience that makes sense for today’s world—that means allowing people to watch how they want, where they want and most importantly, WHEN they want,” Burke told her staff. “So our reporting will now align with our business and most importantly, our consumer.”

In ABC’s first week of multiplatform-plus-35-day ratings, most of its shows tripled their audience in the 18-49 demo compared with live-plus-same-day.

“In no other business would you go out and sell or talk about something that had no really lasting impact on your success as a measure of success,” Burke told Adweek last week. “It’s about time we stopped, and time we took a page from Freeform and start the narrative here. And I think that, eventually, the business will follow.”

Burke recounted at Brandweek that her kids love Grown-ish, the spinoff series of her network’s critically acclaimed sitcom Black-ish. But they don’t watch the show on ABC’s sister network, Freeform. Instead, they watch it on Hulu.

“I don’t care where you watch it—we’re still capturing you as a viewer—but it was really instructive to me how they were watching the shows,” said Burke, who oversaw original programming on Freeform before she took over ABC Entertainment a year ago.

After the panel, she told Adweek that ABC is starting to see the same shift in consumer viewing habits that she witnessed at Freeform.

“About two years ago when I was there, our audience was having more viewers in delayed digital than we did in linear,” she said. “That happened this fall at ABC. We’re seeing our digital numbers, our delayed viewing oftentimes eclipses our live same-day viewers. And that’s OK because we’re capturing value, but it’s incumbent on us to keep paying attention to where people are and how they are watching.”

Burke is no stranger to rejiggering the measures television networks rely upon. When she was executive vice president of prime-time series at NBC, the company started reporting its ratings in the 18-49 demographic because that’s what it was selling to advertisers, Burke recalled.

“Over the course of a couple of months we changed the narrative, and we changed the value of our business,” Burke said. “I feel like we are at that kind of crossroads again.

This is not the death of linear television. People are watching, and particularly with our audience, more. They're just watching differently. So we have to get better at telling that story and capturing that value."

Of course, shifting an industry standard isn't always met with acceptance from industry partners. Burke said that while writers and showrunners are often understanding, there's an "educational process" to getting other partners on board.

"It's more about getting some of the other legacy businesses on board, making sure our affiliate partners feel comfortable," Burke said. "That's just where it's going, and we can either lead or follow."

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