

Disney Touts Upfront Offerings and Coverage the Super Bowl Has 'Never Experienced'

For its upfront event last year, Disney teased Star Wars and Marvel projects; brought out stars such as Emma Stone and Rob McElhenney; touted a robust sports slate that included NFL, college football, and WNBA; and even hosted an afterparty where Danny DeVito was hanging out and taking selfies.

This year's goal is simple: outdo it all.

"I thought our show last year hit it out of the park, and yet this year the plan is to one-up it," Rita Ferro, Disney's president of global advertising, explained to ADWEEK. "We're super excited about what people are going to see, the announcements we're going to make, the talent that's going to be on stage, and all of that with a focus on brevity."

Brevity may be a challenge, especially with Disney's full roster of live entertainment tentpoles like the Oscars with Conan O'Brien and the Country Music Awards; a sports lineup with properties such as college football, the NFL, the WNBA, and the NBA; and an ongoing expansion of Disney+ globally.

Plus, the company is already having talks for its upcoming 2027 Super Bowl, which Disney will air in the first couple months of that year alongside the College Football Championship, the Grammys, and Oscars.

Ahead of Disney's upfront presentation on May 13, Ferro spoke with ADWEEK about the company's upcoming offerings, addressed the current market uncertainty brought on by tariffs, and

explained what Disney has in mind for Super Bowl 61.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

You're trying to one-up last year's upfront event. However, last year, you made your entrance in a Family Guy cartoon, so that's not easy.

That was a lot of fun. I'm not gonna lie. And by the way, as a mom, I got more props for that than absolutely anything else I do. So that was a moment. It was really special.

What are the priorities this year?

The importance for us is on, "We have unrivaled storytelling and the most diverse and robust portfolio of sports rights in the marketplace, bar none." Disney sits at the intersection of quality storytelling and content, as well as the most advanced technology and data stack that was built for streaming, so people know exactly what they're buying when they come here. Yet, at the same time, we want to make sure that we're providing the most value for our partners and agencies and things that they're looking forward to doing across our portfolio. That's anchored in both IP and how we think about live, which is such a critical piece of everything brands are talking to us about.

You can have streaming platforms of all shapes and sizes, all types of content, but the stories matter. We know that based on the way that we deliver on outcomes for customers, and that's important. Ultimately, being flexible, understanding the environment that they're in right now in terms of what's going on in this dynamic marketplace with changes in business cultures, tariffs, supply chain, and so we're in with our

partners every single day having those conversations to make sure that this is ultimately about outcomes, not eyeballs.

You mentioned tariffs. How is Disney approaching brands amid the current uncertainty?

We want to make sure that for the brands that want to take advantage of these moments, for the brands that need help in how they show up in these moments, that they have the most opportunity, whether that's through live sports, streaming, big campaigns, small campaigns, integration, second screen experiences, different types of advertising formats, all the flexibility that's required to be the best partner that they have.

What we have found—we found it in Covid-19—we've seen it time and time again in times of challenged marketplaces, that's a moment where people go back to their tried and true partners, where they spend more with the brands that they trust, who have been transparent with them, who have been in it with them, and who have proven that they're great partners and deliver the outcomes that they need.

You had an ad sales reorganization last summer to reach more midmarket advertisers. What are the results since then?

Having that midmarket team, in just the short period of time that we have, we've really seen a significant difference in the types of business we're doing with them. It also helps from a perspective of seeing different marketplaces and having a diversified pool of marketers across the portfolio—because different industries are going to be impacted differently by these tariffs. We grew our advertiser base significantly in the last couple of months. Having that is important for us to continue to diversify and learn candidly from different industries.

What are the live sports tentpoles you're excited to share with advertisers?

What am I excited about? So much. I'm just gonna go through my calendar! Our college football portfolio of sports rights this year is outstanding. The new format for the College Football Championship, the SEC coming to ESPN and ABC, the ACC and the growth of that conference, all of college football is a tremendous driver of multiyear partnerships with brands, and I couldn't be more excited about College GameDay and the growth there.

We continue to have an incredible opportunity around the NFL together with college football. There is no home for football in the fall bigger and with more opportunity for brands than ESPN and ABC. We have incredible talent in front and behind the camera. The ManningCast, as well, to give you an alternative viewing experience, is hilarious. We have the NBA deal, of all of these new NBA deals, that matters. We have everything except one round of the playoffs on ESPN, ABC, and we exclusively have the NBA Finals, and the majority of the money on NBA moves in that window. In addition, we will now have Inside the NBA. And by the way, as part of that deal, we also got a renewed deal with the WNBA, which, again—women's sports. Could I say anything more? Sixty-five percent of all live women's sports hours sit across our platform. And that is a massive growth opportunity for us.

What can you say about the ESPN flagship streamer coming later this year?

We are thrilled to have ESPN streaming. That will launch in the fall, and that will be the place for fans to come to experience not only all 100% of all of their live sports and network coverage, but sports betting, sports fantasy, social sharing, clips, the best of talent and everything they're doing, all in one place with personalization that they've never had before. Not only the massive sports fan, but the casual sports consumer, will have one place where they'll find everything they want to watch from ESPN and ABC to consume,

engage, share, and spend time. I am super excited about what that's going to mean in terms of how we extend the sports brand partnerships with all of the customers we're working with.

In addition, you have the Super Bowl coming in 2027. Have talks already started there?

We have over 67 multiyear deals that are mostly anchored in football, and so many of those are coming up now, and clients want to have the opportunity to tie in what they're doing in that space to be a part of the Super Bowl. Those conversations have been happening for a while now.

It's also an event that's going to be happening in Los Angeles, which is our home. Our headquarters is in Los Angeles. We have a park in Los Angeles, so there are a lot of conversations around how the Walt Disney Company takes over and shows up for the Super Bowl in a way that will be representative of not only everything ESPN does and ABC does and all of our news and information shows do, but how does the Walt Disney Company show up through our station, KABC, in L.A., too? So we're going to have a surround coverage that I think the Super Bowl has never experienced.

Recommended videos

<https://www.adweek.com/convergent-tv/disney-upfront-offerings-super-bowl/>