Why 2020 Will Be a Big Year for CBS All Access

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CBS Interactive is set to have a banner year in 2020, when the digital network fully realizes its vision for original content on its 5-year-old subscription streaming service, CBS All Access.

That’s according to Marc DeBevoise, president and COO of CBS Interactive, who spoke on Tuesday at Adweek’s Convergent TV Summit.

CBS All Access launched in 2014 without any originals, and only limited access to live events.

DeBevoise said the over-the-top (OTT) service started out with one goal: “Let’s put the best of everything we have out there,” which also gave rise to the name All Access.

In other words, the lineup included everything CBS could offer “with the right value proposition across devices,” such as a 5,000-episode library, live TV from its stations, and the current seasons of CBS shows that, at the time, included The Big Bang Theory, NCIS and Criminal Minds.

DeBevoise called this cumulative offering “a big give at the time.”

And yet, in the immortal words of singer Bob Dylan, the times they are a-changin’. By 2020, CBS All Access will have beefed up its slate with more than 14 original shows, including Star Trek: Discovery, The Good Fight, Why Women Kill and The Twilight Zone.

This comes as competition increases in the streaming space with new OTT services from Disney, WarnerMedia and NBCUniversal. But DeBevoise said CBS is well positioned now.

Unlike some of its streaming competitors that makes entire seasons of a show available at once, CBS All Access leans toward weekly releases because “we feel like from a marketing perspective, it gives us more of a chance to make consumers aware of that show … and then, content-wise, we can focus on how to best service the show,” DeBevoise said.

This strategy also allows storylines to develop over time.

Viewers who want to binge can, of course, wait until the end of the season. “Thirteen hours straight of Star Trek: Discovery is some people’s idea of a great weekend, but it’s a lot of content for one sitting,” he added.

The half-hour series No Activity, which was the first original comedy to launch on the service in 2017, is lighter fare, and therefore a different case. “We make that decision on a content-by-content basis,” DeBevoise said.

In addition, CBS All Access has had a couple of years to ramp up, as opposed to streaming services that emerged more recently and had to hit the ground running.

DeBevoise said CBS has built an audience over time by appealing to individual cohorts rather than a broad swath of viewers all at once.

CBS Interactive also has five years of data on conversion, retention, CPAs, how its audience reacts to content, how content plays together and how to lead in from show to show, he added.

With the addition of a streaming service from premium cable network Showtime, DeBevoise is confident they “have the tiger by the tail with this service” and that CBS Interactive is

delivering value for users.

Another feather in its cap: the upcoming merger between CBS and media conglomerate Viacom, which will form ViacomCBS. In addition to CBS All Access, streaming services from the combined company will include free service Pluto TV, news channel CBSN, sports news network CBS Sports HQ, entertainment news network ET Live, and BET+, the ad-free video-on-demand service from Viacom's BET Networks and Tyler Perry Studios that launched in September.

The merger will make ViacomCBS the sixth largest internet company in the U.S. and give it the largest share of the U.S. TV audience among media companies—and it will be one of the largest places to buy digital ads in the world, he said.

"I feel like we're in a really good position combined," DeBevoise said.

At the same time, he doesn't think the future of streaming is a zero-sum game in which consumers pick one service and dump the rest. "It's really about the value delivered for the user at the price," he added.

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