# ‘Wicked’ Start: How NBCU Kicked Off Upfront Week

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Last year’s NBCUniversal upfront was hindered by Hollywood strikes and former ad sales chief Linda Yaccarino leaving for Twitter/X days before the event. This time around, things were wickedly different.

With entertainment talent back on the table for NBCU’s Monday event from Radio City Music Hall, Jimmy Fallon opened things up by parodying Beyonce’s “Texas Hold ‘Em,” the company showcased an exclusive look at the first Wicked trailer, and Seth Meyers roasted Yaccarino for her move to Twitter.

“NBC is launching a new adventure series called Destination X,” Meyers said. “Destination X was originally titled The Linda Yaccarino Story.”

Ahead of the show, ad sales chief Mark Marshall told ADWEEK he was looking forward to bringing back talent for a “traditional” upfront after last year’s event, which brought on the challenges of last-minute changes and Marshall having to unexpectedly close things out with 72 hours’ notice.

“I would say, other than my wife and daughter who were in the crowd last year, everyone will be much more excited to see celebrities as opposed to me,” Marshall told ADWEEK. “I will play a smaller role—thankfully.”

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Here are the highlights from NBCU’s start to upfront week:

## A ‘Wicked’ introduction

NBCU showcased the first official Wicked trailer during its event, which will go live online later in the week. Throughout the trailer, stars Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo showcased classic moments from the Broadway musical, including Erivo receiving a certain iconic witch’s hat. Donna Langley, chairman and chief content officer at NBCUniversal Studio Group, noted the movie would receive an “enormous” push.

Throughout the presentation, the company brought out big names to introduce its latest content and announcements, including Kevin Hart and Taraji P. Henson promoting Fight Night: The Million Dollar Heist; Snoop Dogg and Michael Bublé announcing they’d be joining Season 26 of The Voice as coaches; and Kenan Thompson, Bowen Yang and Heidi Gardner talking about Saturday Night Live’s upcoming 50th anniversary, which is getting a three-hour special in February.

The event was more about streaming and less about the fall lineup than upfronts have been in the past; however, NBC’s recently announced fall schedule received a section, with Zachary Quinto touting medical drama Brilliant Minds; Telemundo also had a moment thanks to a Sed de Venganza promo.

Though the Olympics is already setting ad sales records, the Games were also on full display with Snoop Dogg, Thompson, Hart and Mike Tirico all talking up the event. NBCU also had its other sports properties in the spotlight, including Sunday Night Football, its exclusive streaming-only NFL game from Brazil, Big Ten matchups and even the 2026 Super Bowl, which Marshall told ADWEEK the company is already in discussions about.

## Results of ad offerings

Marshall closed out the presentation, joking that the event's biggest surprise was that he was "renewed for Season 2" after stepping into the job at the last minute in 2023.

Among the ad highlights, Marshall touted the company's One Platform Total Audience offering, which utilizes NBCU's AI-driven planning and activation tech, leveraging the company's investments in automation and data to provide deduplicated reach through a single buy across linear and streaming.

"We partnered with Amgen and OMG to run two parallel campaigns. Both equal dollars—however, one plan [was on] One Platform Total Audience, while the other was a legacy transaction," Marshall said. "The results exceeded even our own expectations. One Platform Total audience delivered 38% higher in-target cross-platform reach and more importantly, a 22% increase in search volume."

The ad sales chief also noted that a project with Dominos and GroupM involved running two parallel campaigns to track purchases on the app and website, resulting in a 38% increase vs. a traditional plan.

"Dominos has been buying NBCU and its content for decades, because it works for their brand. Yet, One Platform Total Audience drove a 38% increase in sales just by finding the right connection to the right consumer at the right time," Marshall noted.

## Other highlights

Kelly Clarkson ended the event by belting out her iconic "Stronger" chorus, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger," which all the victims of Seth Meyers' roast should also keep

in mind.

In addition to Meyers’ Yaccarino joke, the Late Night With Seth Meyers host took aim at Paramount, saying he was in the running for the company after finding money on the street.

“It’s been a very good day for me. I found $20 on the street this morning. Long story short, I’m one of the two finalists for Paramount,” Meyers said.

The comedian also put NBC’s expensive streaming on blast, noting, “Peacock continues to prove that the easiest way to make $1 billion is to spend $8.”

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