



TV'S 2020-21 PRIMETIME UPFRONT: SUCCESS DEPENDS UPON PERSPECTIVE

Media Dynamics, Inc. releases preliminary estimates in advance
of their annual upfront and CPM-CPP reports

Nutley, NJ, October 26, 2020 - The national TV networks completed their 2020-21 primetime upfront sales just prior to the beginning of the fourth quarter, much later than usual due to the disruptive impact of the COVID pandemic. Many of these negotiations were long, drawn-out affairs because of uncertainties regarding program content, anticipated viewing levels, the buyers' desire for more flexibility on cancellation rights, and other factors not normally associated with past upfronts. When the dust finally settled, the sellers obtained much smaller CPM hikes than they would have liked, ranging between 2-4%, with "premium" primetime fare usually on the high end of the scale.

We estimate that 2020-21 upfront buys totaled \$18.6 billion for the broadcast networks and cable channels, which was a significant decline of almost 15% compared to the totals for the previous upfront as originally negotiated. However, almost \$3 billion of the 2019-20 upfront buys were cancelled due to the worsening economic conditions caused by COVID, which were felt most heavily in the second quarter of 2020, but also extended into the third quarter.

"Once we adjusted our upfront ad spend figures to account for these cancellations, the sellers did quite well," commented Ed Papazian, President of Media Dynamics, Inc. As shown in the attached table, 2020-21 upfront ad revenues for the broadcast networks and cable channels were down by only 2% compared to the amounts that advertisers actually spent—less cancellations—for the 2019-20 upfront.

2020-21 PRIMETIME TV UPFRONT AD SPEND VS. 2019-20 UPFRONT

	Broadcast Networks	Cable	Total
2019-20 As Originally Bought	\$10,180	\$11,690	\$21,870
2019-20 After Cancellations	8,900	10,100	19,000
2020-21 Estimated Upfront	8,710	9,920	18,630
2020-21 vs. Original 2019-20 Buys	-19.4%	-15.1%	-14.8%
2020-21 vs. Post-Cancellation 2019-20 Buys	-2.1%	-1.8%	-2.0%

Note: Spending figures in millions.

Source: Media Dynamics, Inc.

It should be noted, however, that because many buyers negotiated more favorable cancellation clauses than had previously been allowed, if a second wave of COVID-19 disruption hits during the fall and winter, major portions of planned upfront spending may again be cancelled.

[TV Dimensions 2020](#) and [MDI Direct](#) subscribers will receive a more detailed report on the 2020-21 upfront, including three-decade trends and breakdowns for each of the broadcast TV networks in the October 27th issue of [TV Dimensions Alert](#). MDI's proprietary upfront CPM-CPP estimates will be released November 4th in the annual [ACES](#) report, followed by [CPMTrack](#) in late-November.

About Media Dynamics, Inc.

[Media Dynamics Inc.](#) is a publishing & consulting company founded in 1982 by Ed Papazian, the former Media Research Director and Media Director of BBDO (1960-75) and co-creator/publisher of **Ad Forum** and **The Media Cost Guide**. MDI's **Dimensions** series has served as *the* reference source for data trending and insights on radio, magazines, TV and intermedia. Media Dynamics' library includes several research annuals and numerous special reports and white papers that focus on targeted areas of the media, e.g. spot TV, cable, ad receptivity, CPMs and upfront cost estimates. Media Dynamics, Inc. has also spent more than 30 years consulting on various media issues, including agency/client interactions on the media function, the hiring of independent media buying services and the evaluation of agency/media buying performance. Past clients include a cross section of TV networks, cable services, magazines, TV & radio reps, advertisers, ad agencies, research companies and new media.