

# TV Now & Then: How We Use It, How It Uses Us

By Ed Papazian

## PROLOGUE

Sixty-five years after its inception, there is no denying that television has had a profound impact on our lives—even the medium’s most vehement critics concede that. The sheer volume of our exposure to the tube and its programs is astonishing. By 2015, an average American adult in his or her mid-forties had devoted a minimum of *eight full years* to watching ad-supported television—to say nothing of pay cable and public television—and been “exposed” to 1.65 million commercials. And those are just the averages; frequent viewers, often derided as couch potatoes and who constitute about one-fifth of the adult population, have devoted at least twice as much time to television and “seen” more than three million commercials.

When I arrived on the scene as a young researcher at BBDO, television was just ending its sponsored TV show era, and the broadcast networks dominated the medium. Indeed, programs aired by ABC, CBS and NBC accounted for almost 60% of America’s total set usage, with the remainder going to local shows on station affiliates (30%) and struggling independent outlets (10%).

Since that time, I have either witnessed or been a participant in all of television’s many evolutions and transformations, as the medium came of age and matured into what it is now—an extremely competitive, highly fragmented smorgasbord of venues and platforms. The broadcast networks, while still the biggest and most powerful, are now minority players when it comes to audience attainment. Even if we include relative newcomers like Fox and the CW, the broadcast TV networks currently attract only about 20-25% of the nation’s total set usage (as measured by Nielsen). Cable, with its multitude of channels, garners over 50%, and local station programming, including syndicated fare, accounts for the remainder. In addition, there are the new “streaming video on demand” (SVOD) services, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, which currently reach more than 40% of America’s TV homes and are luring younger and upscale audiences who prefer their brand of content and, especially, the ad-free viewing experience.

During my career as a TV researcher, followed by a media planning pioneer, a media director, and an entrepreneur involved in many research, publishing and consulting ventures, I have been responsible for a number of initiatives that have had a direct bearing on how TV shows are evaluated and how advertisers use the medium. Among these, the original Simmons syndicated multi-media surveys that provided, for the first

time, detailed information on TV viewing, not only demographically but also in terms of product usage. I also designed the first broadly-based, large sample viewer attentiveness studies that continue to this day in various forms. Additionally, I developed two TV ad cost estimating services—**Media Market Guide** for spot television and **Netcosts** for network TV, cable and syndication; both of these ongoing services are now owned by SQAD. I have, at various times, dealt with actors, agents and TV producers, as well as networks and cable channels, helping them to evaluate sales strategies and program concepts. On several occasions I have written proposals for new series, including casting, future storylines and a few scripts. I even helped edit several movies for content so they could be aired on network TV.

The point of this little resume is that my background is sufficiently varied, so as to enable me to appreciate the many nuances and tradeoffs that are involved in both the business of television and how audiences respond to both ads and programming. Consequently, this book focuses on two pivotal aspects: the first is the evolution of the medium's programming and how audiences respond ("How we use it") and the second concerns the business side—how programs are created, how time is bought and sold, how ads are created and how they function ("How it uses us"). In both cases I have tried to tell it like it is, while still being as objective as possible, despite strong personal feelings I harbor about some of the events and practices the book covers.

One final note. While all readers are welcome, this book is written mainly for people in the advertising and media business who are familiar with the jargon and machinations involved. Accordingly, we do not pause to define terms like "reach and frequency," "GRPs" or "share of audience," as we assume the reader knows what these mean.

Welcome to **TV Now & Then: How We Use It, How It Uses Us**

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