

# New Syndie Talkers Hit Madison Avenue

Buyers take notes as fresh originals join off-net series in upfront pool

**N**OT SO LONG AGO, media buyers would head to NATPE to check out the new programs coming into syndication. Now, not many agency people make the trip.

Chris Geraci, president for national broadcast at OMD, says he went to NATPE last year and was one of the few agency people at the convention.

"You don't really need to go there to know what's for sale in syndication," Geraci says. "Syndication now is dominated by off-net sitcoms, and there's no reason to go through the expense and time of attending a conference if that's the goal."

Indeed, thanks partly to the recession, syndicators in recent years have mainly relied on established shows—

[the show] out and get it top of mind?"

When upfront season rolls around in the spring, it's tough for syndication to stand out.

"I think it's an undervalued daypart that's held up fairly well," says Marc Morse, senior VP at media agency RJ Palmer. Some people discount the value of syndication because the shows don't all run "clean" at the same time on the network affiliates from market to market. Morse notes that some syndicated shows like stalwarts *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy!* would be top-15 shows if they aired in primetime on a network.

"The thing you haven't seen in syndication the last couple of years, really since the financial meltdown of 2007-08, was a lot of new shows," Morse says.

running successful show last May.

"With the daytime shows coming out, everyone's looking to be the next Oprah. But no one's going to be the next Oprah. She was different," Carr says.

Lake was a hot commodity when her first talk show came out decades ago. "She'll find an audience," Carr says. Twentieth Television has started a social media campaign to get Lake back into people's consciousness—and Carr believes she still has a following.

While some buyers recall that another popular former *Today* star, Jane Pauley, bombed in syndication, Morse believes Couric's show will succeed. "If there's serious breaking news, she's going to try to get those guests, and when it comes time for the Golden Globes or Oscars, she's going to have those fun interviews," he says. "So I think it will be good for advertisers and good for syndication."

Among returning shows, Morse also thinks that *Live! With Kelly* will do well next season. Ratings are up since cohost Regis Philbin left and Kelly Ripa has worked with a series of guest hosts. "She's going to attract a much younger female audience," Morse says. "I think they're going to pick up a lot of new advertisers next year."

This season, buyers say syndication has had few unpleasant surprises, although the audiences of some of its big off-network hits are eroding. As in other dayparts, the scatter market has been quiet, although that impacts syndication less than network or cable. "Syndication generally comes out of the upfront better sold than anything else," Geraci notes.

As the upfront approaches, buyers expect the same trends affecting broadcast and cable to shape the syndication market. "The increases will be modest," predicts Morse. "The [price] increase could be mid-single digits as far as CPMs," or cost per thousand viewers. "I think the money will be slightly up. There will be more scatter for next year. And the improving economy will help the syndicators be up for this upfront coming up." ■

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—Chris Geraci, OMD president for national broadcast



both off-network and original—to carry the load. But this year, syndicators are feeling it's a good time to gamble on new shows, particularly talk shows. And if Madison Avenue won't come to them, they're going to Madison Avenue. Last week, Geraci met with Jeff Probst; in November, he had lunch with Katie Couric. Both are set to host new syndicated talk shows this fall.

Geraci thinks it's smart for syndicators to start talking to media buyers as early as they can. "They all know that we're not going to see them down at NATPE and so once they've got their clearance locked in, they should be out talking to advertisers and agencies," he says. "Once they're locked in, why not get

This year, in addition to Couric and Probst, Ricki Lake and Steve Harvey are jumping into the talk show pool, which could help syndication get attention from buyers.

During the upfront, syndication is rarely top of mind, "unless there's something coming out that could be a game-changer," says Gary Carr, senior VP, executive director of national broadcast at Targetcast. "Last year, there was a lot of talk about syndication because *Oprah* left the market. People were talking about, 'Should we take money out of syndication? Should we keep it there or buy cheaper stuff?'"

Carr says syndication is still recovering from the loss of *Oprah Winfrey*, who stopped doing her long-

## Fox Draws Beers As UFC Sponsors

Fox says it has nearly sold out this month's UFC broadcast and has managed to get beer rivals Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors to both stake out positions within the octagon.

Anheuser-Busch, a longtime backer of UFC, will be the presenting sponsor of all four live fight cards on Fox this year, beginning with the Jan. 28 event. A-B will also present live fights on FX and Fuel, according to Todd Siegel, executive VP, Fox Cable Sports Ad Sales.

MillerCoors will sponsor the *Ultimate Fighter* reality series, which will air on FX.

About half of the spots on Fox's UFC Jan. 28 show were

bought by movie studios and video game makers. The strong ratings and high composition of young men during the first Fox UFC broadcast in November helped sell the upcoming bout, and that night, the main event lasted just 64 seconds, Siegel notes. Ratings numbers exceeded Fox's estimates and are expected to be higher this time, resulting in higher ad prices. "We got good rates the first go-round and we're getting good rates the second time around."

Sources say spots on the broadcast cost about \$150,000.

Deals to get a telecom and an auto company on board are imminent, according to Siegel. Past UFC events have been sponsored by Chrysler's Jeep division. A fast food sponsor is expected in time for the spring bout on Fox. —JL



The Nov. 12 Velasquez vs. Dos Santos UFC bout on Fox lasted barely a minute, but Fox says demand is strong for ad time on its Jan. 28 UFC telecast.

(Bottom) Ray Mickshaw / Fuel / Fox Sports