Variety
DirecTV to Hike Rates as Much as 6% in 2015

Los Angeles Times
MSNBC to widen its scope and make other changes, its president says

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
Pennsylvania AG Kane grand jury may miss New Year's Eve deadline

Allentown Morning Call
Political winds shift in Harrisburg, Lehigh Valley's power in D.C. rises in 2014

Philadelphia Inquirer
Message to DNC: Philly mayoral field 'all in' for 2016 convention bid

You'd think by now people might be tired of "The Hangover," the raunchy 2009 comedy about four guys and the bachelor party from hell. After all, the movie has run 72 times on HBO and Cinemax, 46 times on TBS and twice on TNT, not to mention video-on-demand and DVDs. Yet last month, Comedy Central got hold of the movie for the first time and promoted it like the arrival of sliced bread. And once again "The Hangover" delivered, bringing in almost one million viewers in its Nov. 15 debut on the Viacom Inc. -owned network, according to Nielsen. The party doesn't involve just "The Hangover." Theatrical movies in general are having a renaissance on television.

Yes, cable networks dream of finding the next "Duck Dynasty" or "The Walking Dead" or buying a rerun that can deliver big ratings like "The Big Bang Theory" has for TBS, but in the meantime they are hedging their bets with movies. Five years ago, 41 basic cable networks aired movies. Now about 60 do, according to an analysis of Nielsen data by Warner Bros. During that same period, the number of times movies aired on basic cable (which doesn't include premium services such as HBO, Showtime and Starz) went to about 50,000 from 29,067.

There are myriad reasons for the growing appeal of movies. While original shows such as FX's "Sons of Anarchy" and TNT's "Rizzoli & Isles" are crucial for building a brand and creating long-term revenue streams, the success rate is small and the investment high. According to Nielsen data, since 2002 there have been more than 1,000 original shows launched on cable and of those only 13%, or around 150, have lasted four seasons, which is when they enter the syndication market and become big moneymakers.

Another longtime staple of cable network schedules—reruns from broadcast networks—are declining in popularity. TNT struck out with reruns of CBS dramas "The Mentalist" and "Hawaii Five-0," while ABC's "Modern Family" has been a disappointment in reruns on USA Network. Time Warner Inc. has said its Turner Broadcasting unit, which includes TNT and TBS, will take a write-down of $400 million this year, largely because of such programming misfires. The company is getting more aggressive in acquiring movie titles. "Movies are a limited-risk investment," said Frances Manfredi, NBCUniversal

Television's president of distribution. Another bonus, she added, is that theatricals usually require far less promotion than an original or acquired series.

FX bets big on movies. The network says that over the past three years it has grabbed roughly 70% of the films that have earned at least $100 million at the box office. (FX parent 21st Century Fox and Wall Street Journal owner News Corp were part of the same company until mid-2013.) TV movies are "a lean-back, comfort-food experience," said Chuck Saftler, chief operating officer of FX Networks. "People tend to get sucked in; it is almost like a flypaper effect." Now other networks are following FX's lead. "A lot of people have seen [Mr. Saftler's] success and are stepping up to the plate to use a similar strategy," Ms. Manfredi said.

Ratings for theatrical movies, while not spectacular, are consistent. Last year, theatricals averaged 2.7 million viewers, only 200,000 less than their average in 2009, despite the huge increase in availability of movies during that time not only on cable but also on online platforms, such as Amazon and Netflix. Basic cable isn't alone in banking on movies. HBO may be best known for original series such as "Game of Thrones" and "Girls," but movies are still a key to its success. Speaking to investors last month, HBO Chief Executive Richard Plepler said movies represent 75% of live viewing. "We're the Millers," a moderately successful film, has been watched over 26 million times since it made its debut last May. "Even 'Game of Thrones' doesn't equal that," Mr. Plepler said.

Typically, a pay channel gets first crack at movies that opened in theaters. HBO, for example, has long-term deals with Warner Bros., Twentieth Century Fox and Universal Pictures. The window where it appears on pay TV usually runs for about 18 months, and then movies go to basic cable for as long as six years. After that, the movies return for a shorter stint on pay before reverting back to the studio, which then resells them.

The longtime formula for pricing theatricals was 12% of gross box office receipts—with a cap on receipts of $200 million. That means movies could go for as much as $24 million. Now that demand is so high, movie studios are changing how they sell movies. Instead of selling a film to one network for four years, they are splitting that "exclusive window," giving multiple networks slices of time to run it. "The studios are working a lot harder to do more than one deal," said Deborah K. Bradley, executive vice president and head of program acquisitions for Turner Broadcasting.

The deals vary. In the past, a network would buy rights to a movie for four years. Now studios are often splitting those four years between two networks. While the network taking the first and third year might pay a little less than they would have under the four-year package, the network buying the second year would likely pay a premium for the earlier access. "There are a number of ways to slice it up to maximize the revenue," said Ken Werner, president of Warner Bros. domestic television distribution.

Also in Hollywood's favor: The major studios have cut back sharply on the number of releases, which means a shrinking supply amid rising demand. In 2009, Warner Bros., Sony, Fox, Disney, Paramount and Universal released 156 movies combined. Last year, that number fell to 124. It isn't just new releases that are hot tickets. Turner's Ms. Bradley said it isn't unusual for people to get into bidding wars over old movies. '"Forrest Gump' always works," she said. – ***Wall Street Journal***