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A panel of rural issues experts will explore the challenges of extending broadband internet access to the outlying areas of Pennsylvania at a public session early next month. The Federation of Democratic Women of Indiana County will sponsor the Rural Internet Access discussion at 7 p.m. Monday, June 4, at the Park Inn, 1395 Wayne Ave., White Township.

The panel will include Penn State Extension Client Relationship Manager Tom Beresnyak, Indiana University of Pennsylvania professor Susan Boser and REA Energy Services President Chad Carrick. The talk will focus on the reasons that rural areas are underserved and what can be done to provide the same level of internet service that's enjoyed by city dwellers. Indiana County Commissioner Sherene Hess will moderate the discussion.

Hess has seen firsthand how the lack of high-speed broadband has affected the county's rural residents. She will draw from that experience to frame the panelists' remarks and encourage panelists and audience alike to consider positive solutions. Beresnyak promotes science-based education to clients in several rural counties. He will describe the advances in agriculture and the Extension's increasing reliance on digital education that requires high-speed internet access.

Boser, a professor of sociology at IUP and the Democratic nominee for U.S. Congress in the 15th District, has expertise in human services in rural areas. She will describe the disadvantages faced by rural residents who cannot participate in the information economy, such as online education and training, conducting business through the internet, accessing email on the iCloud, using video conferencing, or telecommuting. Carrick, the CEO of REA Energy, has 16 years of experience in the electric utility industry and 10 years of researching regional broadband development. He will speak about the challenges local, rural utilities face in expanding high-speed access to the internet. —

Indiana (PA) Gazette

The 2017-18 broadcast season officially came to a close on Wednesday night, and while each of the Big Four networks issued the usual hooey about how well they had fared over the course of the last 35 weeks, there's little of substance to celebrate in the final ratings numbers.

Such is the state of live TV viewing that almost no light gets in between the shows that are brought back for another season and those that end up on the scrapheap. According to Nielsen live-plus-same-day data, the average demo delivery for a show that's been re-upped for the coming season is a 1.2, which works out to 1.55 million adults 18 to 49. Three years ago, the average rating for a renewed series was a 1.9. That there's almost nothing separating the doomed from the saved speaks volumes about the ongoing ratings erosion. The average draw for the 30 shows that have been terminated is a 0.8. As such, the gap between those that shall live to fight another day and those that have a date with the undertaker can accommodate only around 515,600 demographically desirable viewers. Three years ago, you could fit about twice many adults 18 to 49 (around 1.03 million) on the dividing line between the quick and the dead.

That the division between televised success and failure is more a crack in the sidewalk than a yawning canyon is in many ways a function of necessity—and an acknowledgment that the legacy business model is evolving to emphasize ad revenue less. On the one hand, if broadcasters canceled every low-rated show, they'd either be forced to dump billions of additional dollars into a development process with an 85 percent failure rate or pare their schedules down to 12 to 14 hours per week. Instead, the Big Four simply renewed more low-rated series than ever before, re-upping 19 shows that failed to deliver so much as a 1.0 in the demo. Three years ago at this time, only four fractional shows were salvaged.

On the other hand, it's fair to say that the push to diversify the business model has begun to lessen the significance of guaranteed commercial impressions. CBS in the first quarter reported that advertising accounted for 44 percent of its revenue, down from 51 percent in the year-ago period.

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The first to exploit the hitherto untapped riches tucked away in its distribution agreements—CBS is on pace to generate \$2.5 billion in retransmission consent and reverse compensation fees by 2020—the network also has aggressively pursued a homegrown content scheme that helps pump out billions more on the back-end (licensing, streaming deals, etc.). When there's that much money to be made outside the ad market, CBS in many respects is no longer at the mercy of the incredible shrinking GRP.

None of which is to say that traditional TV advertising is in any mortal danger, although given all the recent talk about reducing commercial loads and junking the C3/C7 currency, it's clear that the network sales bosses are more than a little spooked by what the Nielsen data portends. And if the ratings charts weren't dispiriting enough (that three-way tie for last place is certainly unprecedented), the already paltry season-ending numbers are inflated by sports and the sort of time-shifting that generally precludes a good deal of ad impressions.

Not to take anything away from NBC—four wins in five seasons is a remarkable feat, especially when you consider the depth of the hole Jeff Zucker dug during the **"managing for the margins"** debacle—but eliminate the impact of Super Bowl LII and the 2018 Winter Olympics and the Peacock didn't exactly set the world on fire this season. Remove sports and news from the data stream, and suddenly the networks fall well short of the 2.0 mark, with NBC's entertainment programming averaging a 1.6 in the demo, while ABC (1.5), CBS (1.4) and Fox (1.2) fall in step behind it.

Take the further step of removing the DVR data and the Big Four's seasonal entertainment demo average hovers around a 1.0 in live-same day, and a 1.3 in the C3 currency if you're being really generous with the rounding. For all the tumult broadcasters have endured over the last, well, two decades, there are at least a few positive signs to be decoded within all the wrack and ruin of the ratings charts. For one thing, seven of the top 20 highest-rated shows are either newcomers, reclamation projects or, in the case of "Roseanne," a show that'd been off the air for so long that it may as well be considered a freshman series. (The recent mania for reboots has made a shambles of basic taxonomy.) That these shows managed to deliver significant gains when compared to the previous occupants of their time slots suggests that people will come back to broadcast TV if the networks give them a few compelling reasons to check back in every once in a while.

Meanwhile, it's not as if the disruption of the TV model is unique to the broadcast nets while the rest of the ad-supported TV ecosystem goes off on its merry way. Cable ratings are just as susceptible to the vagaries of consumer behavior—so much so that even the vast majority of shows on such standout channels as AMC and FX would be hard pressed to compete with all but the lowest-rated series on the CW. Only three ad-supported cable series deliver sufficient impressions to warrant placement alongside the top 50 broadcast shows ... although one of them is a real doozy. As TV's third-highest-rated program, AMC's "The Walking Dead" would tuck in behind "Sunday Night Football" and "Roseanne," while companion series "Fear the Walking Dead" and FX's "American Horror Story" would occupy two spots near the end of the list.

As the dust settles on the season that was[n't], the network programmers are putting the finishing touches on their fall release schedules while the ad sales execs wait for the budgets to roll in. Depending on who's keeping score, the broadcast nets last year booked anywhere from \$8.75 billion to nearly \$10 billion in upfront commitments, and this after a season that was as resolutely underwhelming as the one that just passed. — **AdAge**

