



## Do TV Time Slots Still Matter?

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As they say, timing is everything.

The key placement of TV shows has been a practice — no, art — since the dawn of time, but it's recently become increasingly unimportant.

Times are changing, and with such recent advents as Netflix and Hulu, the TV industry is going to need to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of technology.

The problem comes down to networks not knowing how to deal with new technologies, notably Netflix, Hulu and season passes on iTunes and Amazon — all of which air past episodes and seasons of TV shows. The era of an episode airing only once and the viewer needing to be in front of the TV when it airs has been over for a few years now, so why do ratings still matter?

If people are subscribing to these services, a measurement of how many people watch a show in one sitting should seem irrelevant. But when taking into account the fact that networks have sold ad space during a program and that ad revenue is a large portion of their budgets, it becomes clear that they need viewers to back up the prices for the ad spaces.

In an effort to counter networks' reign over original, scripted programming, the online services have taken a recent swing at new projects.

Hulu has tried its hand at original programming, though it's Netflix that's really taken a gamble.

The online subscription service is moving from archived shows and movies to original programming by reviving Fox's cult classic *Arrested Development* and creating the highly anticipated original series *House of Cards*.

Netflix's strategy is to release all episodes of these shows at once — causing TV executives to scratch their heads, trying to figure out how to coexist in the same world as these radical competitors.

With these online providers in mind, networks are constantly trying to figure out how to maximize audiences, and often the solution is to shuffle shows around to see if they will perform better or worse in alternate time slots.

The only real graveyard shift in terms of scheduling is the dreaded Friday night.

Aptly termed the "Friday night death slot," many shows have experienced a slow — or quick — death after being placed at the end of the work week.

Among those that have choked in the dreaded spot include ABC's *Ugly Betty* and *Two Guys, a Girl and a Pizza Place* as well as Fox's *Dollhouse* and *Firefly*.

Though many shows have seen themselves canceled after being abandoned on Friday nights, many shows have actually thrived there: The WB/The CW's *Smallville*, *Supernatural* and ABC's *Boy Meets World*, which flaunted its TGIF time slot, to name a few.

So even the dreaded wasteland that is Friday night isn't necessarily the final nail in the coffin.

When it comes to new programming, networks are also constantly trying to figure out a way to promote them more efficiently.

This season saw an incredible movement of networks, especially NBC, placing pilots online or airing them before their actual premiere dates.

Networks could start to see this as a way to get viewers involved with shows before they become too set on a TV schedule, but if everyone starts doing it, things can get pretty messy and the fall premiere calendar would combust.

While trying to figure out how to better promote new content, the question still persists: How do you appropriately support established content as well as the new?

It goes without saying that lead-ins are still extremely important to the symbiotic relationship of new and established programming. One prime example is the key to ABC's *The Neighbors*' success this season: ABC's *Modern Family*. Having the lead-in of the critically acclaimed comedy isn't too shabby for a mediocre new sitcom, and their pairing has done wonders — and probably performed a few miracles as well.

Perhaps the most notable lead-in in the history of the world, the Super Bowl, was very kind to CBS's *Elementary* this year despite a power outage, which delayed the game for over 30 minutes. Super Bowl XLVII gave *Elementary* its most successful episode to date, earning a 12.0 household rating and 24 share.

When networks get desperate and are unable to make big moves, shows get shifted around multiple times, usually from one time slot to another — and sometimes back again.

One prime example of this is NBC's *Parks and Recreation*, which has fluctuated in viewers after being moved from 8:30 p.m. EST to 9:30 p.m. EST and back again many times. This can lead to one overarching problem: establishing a loyal audience. A constant shifting can confuse fans and cause them to forget what time a series airs, leading to an easy loss in viewers.

The one problem with putting the audience first, though, is that it often comes into conflict with the network's business mindset of wanting the maximum number of viewers to bring in ad revenue.

Another important notion to consider regarding time slots is a show's competitors on other networks. When **Tina Fey** accepted her Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Comedy Series, for instance, she referenced her show's ratings battle when plugging the finale of *30 Rock*. "Just tape *The Big Bang Theory* for once, for crying out loud," she said.

So while everyone waits for the industry to figure out what to do with DVR, Netflix and Hulu, one thing still remains: Networks control what goes on the air, but they can't control how many people watch it.