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NATPE
DAILY • 1

JANUARY 25, 2010

TV Budgets in 2010 To Return 'Liquid'

After a dismal 2009, industry professionals from around the world have high hopes for 2010. *VideoAge* spoke to a handful of international executives to find out what can be expected from the new year, what the biggest challenges will be and which regions are expected to rebound.

Overall, the tone amongst the executives interviewed was one of conservative optimism. Gary Marenzi, co-president of Worldwide Television Distribution for Los Angeles, California-based MGM, stated that the industry was already on the mend. "We've already seen signs of revitalization," he said. "Buyers are starting 2010 with unfrozen budgets, compared to 2009, when many purchases seemed to be on hold due to the economic downturn." In light of this recovery, Marenzi and company have a slew of projects planned, including television and feature film development, digital

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U.S. Midseason Fiction is Drama

In terms of U.S. domestic television, NATPE is the time for unveiling mid-season replacements and back-up shows at the network level. This year, the season experienced a bit of drama of its own when, as predicted by *VideoAge* last June, NBC's 10:00 pm experiment with *The Jay Leno Show* did not work out as planned. By restoring the prime-time hour, NBC has now created a more complicated checker board situation.

In terms of new shows, the nets will premiere 13 series in the next few weeks, all announced at the last L.A. Screenings (with the exception of Fox's *Our Little Genius*). Now international broadcasters will be able to better assess their strengths and air stay.

The following is a brief assessment of this mid-season:

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NATPE's Numbers Tell Different Stories

An estimated 2,000 participants are expected at this year's NATPE, compared to the 3,000 people reported last year and 6,500 recorded in 2008. This downtrend is expected to



"You're holding the chart wrong!"

have reached bottom and next year, in Miami, Florida, a full NATPE recovery is anticipated.

The numbers are somewhat more encouraging if one looks at the seller-buyer ratio. With 180 TV distributors (down from 300 in 2008) and some 420 buyers registered, there are more than two buyers for each seller. This is comparable to markets such as MIP, if only on a smaller scale. Another way to look at NATPE's numbers is in terms of costs.

At a price of slightly more than \$7,000 per exhibiting suite, or \$18 per buyer, NATPE is more expensive compared to other markets, like the AFM in Santa Monica, which costs about \$10 per

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Television Sets End of Childhood

In a recent lecture to Britain's Royal Television Society in Cambridge, leading producer and Honorary Professor of Media Studies at Liverpool's John Moore's University, Phil Redmond posed two questions. First, who might adequately rescue children's programming? Second, if the answer to the first question is "no one," is there a chance that future generations will abandon the medium? Redmond seems to think so, warning, "If we lose our children's interest, we will lose television itself — as each subsequent generation will consign it further and further to the margins as simply 'mom and pop TV'— something people 'used to do.'"

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Midseason

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ABC

Keeping most of its lineup intact, ABC is only adding two new midseason series. Hour-long dramedy *The Deep End* hit the airwaves on Thursday, Jan 21. The show, which is filling *Flash Forwards*' usual 8 pm spot while the latter is on hiatus, follows the story of five first-year lawyers competing for a coveted spot at a top tier law firm. Also new is drama *Happy Town*, though a specific premiere date has not yet been set. Centering on the bizarre happenings in a small town in Minnesota, the show has drawn many comparisons to 1990s David Lynch brainchild *Twin Peaks*.



A scene from CW's midseason series *Life Unexpected*

TV Budgets

(Continued from Cover)

media licensing, collaborations with cable channels and much more.

Despite widespread hopefulness, executives still expressed awareness that many of 2009's problems have carried over to the new decade. Ken Dubow, president of new Los Angeles-based company Opus Distribution pointed out, "Cash will be the challenge of all companies in 2010, especially at the beginning of the year, because it was so scarce in 2009." Nevertheless, Dubow predicted that 2010 will be a "watershed year," for the industry worldwide, in terms of digital delivery. "I see technology emerging as a money-maker," he said. "It will finally start making major

CBS

The Eye network has a handful of new shows on tap for the Winter and Spring. *Undercover Boss* kicks off its midseason fare on February 7, directly following the Super Bowl. On this reality show, high-level corporate executives go undercover in the lowest level jobs at their companies to find out what their employees really think of them. Drama *Miami Medical*, which is slated to debut on Friday, April 2 at 10 pm, follows a team of expert surgeons saving lives in a trauma unit. Meanwhile, cop drama *The Bridge* and controversial reality show *Arranged Marriage* have yet to be assigned air dates.

CW

Teen-oriented mini-net the CW had just one series premiere lined up for the Winter/Spring midseason. On January 18, drama *Life Unexpected* made its debut. The series occupies the 9-10 pm

slot, and like much of the CW's content, is a prime-time teen soap. This time around, a young girl's journey to become emancipated from her parents is the central theme.

FOX

Pre-teen game show *Our Little Genius* was set to premier on January 13, but the series was pulled the week before its air date and now remains in limbo. Producer Mark Burnett explained that he "discovered that there was an issue with how some information was relayed to contestants during the pre-production," and felt a moral obligation to reshoot it. Male-skewing action drama *Human Target* took its place in the slot after *American Idol* on January 20, while

the inaugural episode of procedural drama *Past Life* will be broadcast on February 11. Finally, live-action comedy *Sons of Tucson* will find a home after *Family Guy* in the 9:30 pm slot on March 14.

NBC

The Peacock net has two new shows premiering in March. From producers Ron Howard and Brian Grazer comes *Parenthood*, a sitcom based on the film of the same name. This comedic take on the trials and tribulations of raising kids starts on March 1 at 9 pm. Jerry Seinfeld dishes out marriage advice in *The Marriage Ref*, a panel series premiering on March 14 at 8 pm.

“*We’ve already seen signs of revitalization. Buyers are starting 2010 with unfrozen budgets, compared to 2009 when many purchases seemed to be on hold due to the economic downturn.*”

— Gary Marenzi



MGM's Gary Marenzi

emerging region to watch. Trend-wise, he highlighted strong visuals as the fad to look for on TV worldwide. "Today we're not only competing for eyeballs with other television shows, but also with DVDs, mobile devices and the Internet," he said.

Like Breakthrough, New York-based Classic Media is expecting big things from Asia. "We're taking a hard look at China and making it part of our strategy," said executive vp, Sales and Co-production, Doug Schwalbe. "We also see strategic opportunities in India and in the switch over from analog to digital TV around the world." Schwalbe added that in the coming year, content-makers and broadcasters alike would be wise to "try to analyze the failure of Leno in prime-time and see whether there's an appetite for scripted programming or whether the problem was with the show."

Where markets are concerned, all executives were in agreement that the MIPs still hold the most importance. Said Intra's Yanovsky, "They are the most international markets." However, many executives also predicted that NATPE would make a comeback with its 2011 move to Miami.

would rely heavily on how the American market develops.

Meanwhile, in China, executives are focused on quality programming. Robert Chua, chairman and founder of Hong Kong-based Health and Lifestyle Broadcast Unlimited, stated that companies in his country would be driven to "create winning programs and formats to appeal to Chinese viewers." Chua pointed to singing contest shows, cooking shows and cross-media interactive series as the programming trends of the year.

Nat Abraham, head of Distribution for Toronto, Canada-based Breakthrough Entertainment cited Asia as the