

Headline: Sports Is Still 'Appointment TV' Amid Shift in Viewing Habits: Horizon's Adam Schwartz

The new year shows signs of bringing back more traditional scheduling of live sports, though the Summer Olympics is still uncertain amid the global pandemic. A "new normal" in viewing habits is emerging, challenging sports leagues, advertisers and broadcasters to adapt to disruptions that started last year.

"There were a lot of unknowns from the media perspective. Obviously, there's a ton of money that's invested in all of these sports," [Adam Schwartz](#), senior vice president and director of sports media at Horizon Media, the world's biggest independent **media** services company, said in this interview with Beet.TV. "Without knowing a schedule of when games are going to be played, it is difficult to plan out an advertiser's messages because sports is such an important part of certain advertisers' portfolios."

The suspension of live sports led broadcasters to offer a variety of make-goods, including expanded in-stadium signage that was more visible on TV. Even as more fans have been allowed back into stadiums, some teams have worked to keep some of that signage in place.

The easiest thing for a lot of these leagues and networks and teams to do was to offer some additional in-stadium advertising opportunities that were TV-visible, Schwartz said. "A lot of that had to do with the local or national league team sponsorships. Because you're losing all of the fans, you're also losing all those activations that come along with that."

In some cases, teams created "fan mosaic" billboards that resembled a video call with hundreds of fans virtually "attending" games while watching the action from home.

"It was very well received," Schwartz said. "Some of these fan mosaics, because there are fans for different teams all over the country, will certainly be a part of some of the offerings moving forward."

Live Sports Offer Immediacy

On-demand video services have given audiences more flexibility to watch their favorite shows at different dayparts, but the immediacy of live sports is hard to replace. Ninety-seven percent of sports viewership happens in real time, as Schwartz notes.

"Sports is still appointment television across the board," he said. "If you have a timely message that needs to be broadcast on a certain day, it's pretty much the only place that you can go to get that message out, just based on how everyone is now consuming their television entertainment, which is on-demand."

Growing OTT Rivalry

Linear TV has the power to reach mass audiences with live sports programming, but that may change as over-the-top (OTT) platforms build viewership. Already, tech giants like Amazon and Facebook have won the digital rights to stream live sports, simulcasting games that are carried on linear TV. Amazon has streamed the NFL's "Thursday Night Football," while Facebook [was said to pull back](#) on video programming after dabbling in live sports like cricket and soccer.

"If someone like Amazon is able to come in and pick off a full NFL package, that will be a game-changer for the overall sports marketplace," Schwartz said. "They're going to be doing a lot of testing and learning of that over the next few years. Until the point it can reach the amount of television can, though, it will be difficult for them to get a strong hold in the overall industry."

Another key priority is to reach younger viewers raised on mobile apps like Facebook's Instagram, Google's YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok. Those viewers show a greater preference for highlight reels and video snippets that can be consumed easily on mobile devices.

The National Basketball Association has responded by developing shorter videos to highlight players and teams, while the National Football League collaborated with [Viacom's Nickelodeon channel](#) on a playoff game simulcast to help explain the intricacies of football to younger viewers.

"You're going to see these leagues take more and more chances like that because they are still trying to grow their base and realizing that with the attention of the average American, it's difficult to plug in and watch an entire game," Schwartz said.

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