

Headline: Streaming Complements Linear TV to Engage Sports Fans: Disney's Danielle Brown

The absence of live sports during the onset of the pandemic challenged sports leagues and broadcasters to provide programming that partly filled the void. For Disney's ESPN, that meant getting creative with its approach to providing everything from documentaries like "The Last Dance" about NBA legend Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls to reformatting events like the NFL Draft.

"This experience that we've all been enduring has really transformed our approach to stay agile and nimble," [Danielle Brown](#), vice president at Disney Advertising Sales, said in this interview with Beet.TV. "At the core of it, is storytelling. Storytelling is always at the core of what we do, and it's imperative to engage fans."

ESPN's internal research found that 90% of consumers describe themselves as sports fans, giving it a broad market to serve with programming. The demand for sports is also evident among advertisers, who bought up its inventory for notable events such as the NBA games on Christmas.

Amid last year's lockdowns, the NFL reformatted its draft weekend that had grown into a massive live event that brought together thousands of fans who cheered for their favorite teams as they picked college players. Instead, the NFL hosted a virtual draft that ESPN covered with 600 camera feeds that captured the action among team managers and players.

The audience for the NFL Draft rose 16% to 55 million viewers, and ESPN expanded its roster of advertisers to more than 100 -- with 60 of those as first-time advertisers.

Multiscreen Experience

Because sports fans are consuming programming on a wider variety of connected devices, Disney ensures that it has distribution rights across those platforms. The expanded reach helps to engage fans, even when they're unable to watch TV.

"It's very evident to us that streaming and linear are very complementary," Brown said. "Television achieves massive reach, and broadcast plays an important role in influencing consumer behavior."

Disney aims to help advertisers to deliver targeted messages at scale with its Disney Hulu XP platform for ad placements among premium video across the company's portfolio. Its data sciences team has built a proprietary, anonymized audience graph based on information about hundreds of millions of consumers. Advertisers can run campaigns to reach viewers at different stages of the purchase funnel.

"We're are prioritizing data, technology and analytics to evolve our capabilities," Brown said.
"We're working very closely with partners on a one-to-one basis because we know our advertising partners have really unique needs in this space."

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