

Broadcast and Video Beat

Carat Programming Weekly Television Update

October 31, 2007



Writers Strike Fact Sheet

Cooler Heads Prevail for Now

A strike by the Writers Guild of America, which could be called as early as tonight, may be delayed a few days or more for a bit of a cooling off period. Still, here's the outlook for national TV production in the U.S. if a strike occurs.

- **Late Night** A possible immediate impact might send all shows into reruns, although late night hosts could continue to work if they choose to do all the writing for their own shows (Johnny Carson and David Letterman did this back in 1988). Cable series such as **The Daily Show** and **The Colbert Report** will likely be shut down. This week's **SNL** (hosted by NBC's Brian Williams) will likely air as planned but a work stoppage of more than a week would also mean reruns.
- **Primetime** For scripted series, the networks have about 6 to 8 shows "in-the-can" or ready to be shot. This would at best take them to January if the networks spread them out enough. Some midseason shows are already shot and ready to go. Many struggling freshman series, that would have been pulled from the schedule by now, have received additional script orders as strike insurance. Newsmagazines and reality programs will continue production. Fox is sitting pretty with its long-lead animation series like the **Simpsons** as well as its strike-proof hit **American Idol**, which can be expanded into extra hours of audition highlights footage if necessary. Should the strike continue through the winter months, original scripted episodes will disappear and be replaced by extra hours of reality/variety and news-related content. Fall freshman series, looking to establish a foothold with viewers, will be badly hurt in the event of a prolonged strike unlike familiar favorites, which can count on loyal fans to come back when the program returns.
- **News, Early Morning** There is no impact on news since news writers are represented by a different union.
- **Daytime** **The Price is Right** and **The View** would see limited impact and daytime drama programming has four weeks worth of episodes ready to go.
- **Cable** Most original series are shot months in advance, so there would be no impact unless the strike is a long one.
- **Syndication** is largely unaffected.

There is a chance that other unions will honor the WGA picket lines, which could place pressure on programming otherwise thought to be unaffected.

We are advising our clients to work with the networks to find suitable equivalent inventory in the event that a strike affects programming. The prevailing tight marketplace makes it important for us to work with the networks to assure our advertisers achieve their marketing objectives. It is hard to replace the reach that national television provides us.

Upfront advertisers have the benefit of audience guarantees which will ensure ratings delivery. However, we will be paying close attention to maintaining the integrity of our clients' delivery as it pertains to overall strength of schedules. Low-rated unscripted make-goods are not a substitute for expensive scripted programs pre-empted by a strike. We will provide both strike and marketplace updates as often as necessary.

The Writers Guild of America represents writers in the motion picture, broadcast, cable and new media industries in both entertainment and news programming.

The key issues in its contract dispute with **AMPTP** (Alliance of Motion Pictures and Television Producers), which mostly center on new media, are as follows:

- **Homevideo Residuals.** the WGA is seeking a doubling of the base rate for calculating payouts
- **New Media Residuals.** The WGA is seeking 2.5% of receipts for all use while AMPTP wants pay less for limited use content.
- **Promotional Use.** WGA wants residuals on any use of streaming video, and AMPTP has strongly resisted.
- **Reality TV.** The WGA is asking for coverage of reality and AMPTP is resistant.
- **The CW.** The WGA is seeking network minimums and residuals.

1988 Strike: Send in the Clones

The 1988 WGA strike spawned some interesting primetime programming choices (*Fox's COPS, despite what you've been reading, is not one of them - it premiered in 1989*). Here's a small sampling from the class of '88.

The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour (CBS) – The fourth incarnation of the brothers' variety show skirted WGA strike rules by having performers write or recycle their own material.

Mission: Impossible (ABC) – No writers needed – a remake of the 1960s series using line-for-line old scripts and stalwart Peter Graves heading a new Impossible Mission force.

It's Garry Shandling's Show – Fox grabbed reruns of this cult comedy that originally aired on Showtime.

America's Most Wanted (Fox) – One of the first reality shows is still going strong almost 20 years later.

Daytime TV– Non-Union replacement writers were hired to work on daytime dramas.

