

2015

Media Centered--"I want my... uhm TV?!"

Winifred Fordham Metz

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, freddie@email.unc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Metz, Winifred Fordham (2015) "Media Centered--"I want my... uhm TV?!"," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 27: Iss. 3, Article 26.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7097>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Media-Centered — “I want my... uhm TV?!”

Column Editor: **Winifred Fordham Metz** (Media Librarian & Head, Media Resources Center, House Undergraduate Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Phone: 919-962-4099) <freddie@email.unc.edu> <http://www.lib.unc.edu/house/mrc>

Column Editor’s Note: *The use of film in the classroom is ubiquitous. Visual theses are on the rise. Interest in documentary studies is growing at an exponential rate. Resultantly, the importance of a rich and varied media resources collection is essential to academic institutions, public libraries, and K-12 media centers. It takes a lot of work, development, and research to maintain and grow a collection like this. Resources that aid in this process are invaluable...*

In writing this column, I’ve touched on many elements of collection development for Media from pedagogy to copyright to nuts and bolts information on streaming media, distribution, the festival circuit, and professional development organizations. Most recently, as the content itself is undoubtedly one of the reasons I most enjoy working with a Media collection, I used a few columns to outline a multi-part list of recent documentary films of note. Amidst Tribeca, Cannes, and a host of other spring film festivals announcing their new feature film line-ups, I toyed with the idea of delving into some kind of approach to fictional narrative. But, a few things seemed to be pointing me in a rather different direction — TV and not so much content as delivery. First, I had the opportunity to attend a recent colloquium held by the Center for Media Law and Policy at UNC, where **David L. Cohen**, executive vice president of **Comcast**, spoke on “The Democratization of Media.” **Cohen** spent a bit of time talking about changes in the landscape of U.S. media and content distribution. But, there were many questions left on the table, and I walked away engaged in a lively debate with a couple of graduate students on the implications of potential mergers like the **Comcast / Time Warner** cable deal — which, if it succeeds, would secure an estimated 60% control of broadband provider and 30% of the pay-TV markets (not surprising since **Comcast** already owns **NBC Universal** and a portion of **Hulu**). We all agreed that such a merger would smooth the path for others like it, and a quick online search later that night yielded multiple articles mentioning the possible merging of: **Charter Communications** and **Bright House Networks**; **AT&T** and **DirectTV**; and even perhaps **CBS** and **Viacom**. Then, a few weeks later, I attended the **Full Frame Documentary Film** festival, where many conversations arose on content distribution, licensing issues, and the recent spate of emerging direct-to-viewer products. So, TV it is; primarily, what does the current landscape look like? Who is watching what and why? And, how will this [continue to] affect the way we purchase media and curate collections at our academic institutions, public libraries, and cultural centers?

*At the time this article was due, the Federal Communications Commission had not formally denied the proposed **Comcast** merger in light of concerns regarding high consolidation of video and broadband Internet, and **Comcast** had yet to abandon its attempt to buy **Time Warner Cable** for an estimated \$45.2 billion. Now, only a few weeks later, **Charter** has confirmed a \$55 billion deal to buy **Time Warner Cable** (along with **Bright House**). Like **AT&T**’s proposed \$48 billion merger with **DirectTV**, this deal, if approved by the FCC, would make **Charter** a strong contender to **Comcast**. It could also pose harm to the online video market and create escalating consumer prices. The deal may have changed players, but still ultimately bears the same concerns. — **WM**

Video Killed the Radio Star

When **MTV** chose to broadcast the **Buggles**’ 1979 hit song “Video Killed the Radio Star” as their first music video when the station went live in 1981, they seemed to be sending themselves up and giving a bit of credence to the concern of many at the time over the installation of a strictly music TV station. Interestingly, the same fuss had been made some 30 years prior, when television truly co-opted the radio star for

its own — moving **Molly Goldberg** and her popular situational comedy cast from their radio broadcast to a visual version shown on **CBS**. This spawned numerous shows in its likeness — and continues today with what we know to be a sitcom. As with those first sitcoms, **MTV** became an overnight hit and paved the way for a number of similar TV stations and a host of new original programming centered on the **MTV** generation. Fast-forward another 30-some years and the **Buggles**’ tune remains fairly apt — this time the lyrics might go “Netflix killed the television star” inciting similar concerns about a particular media’s impending demise. Where Radio undoubtedly survived the advent of TV and **MTV**, today’s media delivery landscape is changing way more drastically and rapidly than ever before, and cable companies and content producers are engaged in an active battle over this new terrain. And now where does that leave TV?

Beyond the Box; Cord Cutters, Untethered Masses, and the like...

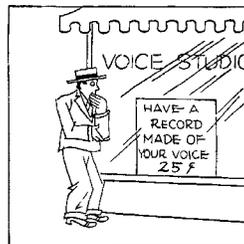
Bundling and selling content to subscribers (typically households) has been around in some fashion since the first cable companies sprang up in the early 1950s. And either via cable or satellite, American households have been moderately steady monthly subscribers (sustaining an average of 50% or more of reporting U.S. households) through the years with only a marked decline noted within the last decade. Bundling commonly entailed companies like **Comcast**, **Cox Communications**, or **Time Warner** approaching content producers (studios) and gathering a variety of their original programming, which they then packaged into multiple-channel selections and offer with a host of other programs for a monthly fee. Now, streaming technology has significantly changed this landscape. For almost a century, families could be counted on to gather around their radios and televisions at home to enjoy evening programming, be it radio and then cable, satellite, or local TV broadcast — but today’s technology (DVRs, video-on-demand, etc.) has increasingly enabled them to control their consumption, catch up on a show when they have time, or binge-watch an entire series in one go. Further still, streaming media enables viewers to untether themselves altogether from traditional cable, cut the cord on box TV, and co-opt visual real estate on their computers, tablets, phones, and other personal media devices. Services like **Netflix**, **Hulu**, **Vimeo**, and **Youtube** have made it entirely possible for consumers to

constantly curate their own content — anytime, anywhere. In a bid to retain current viewers, lure new subscribers, and ensure some purchase in the market, producers and cable companies alike have invested heavily in creating highly produced original programming. Many attribute to this the bringing back of the golden age of television with shows like **HBO**’s *Girls*, *True Detective*, *The Veep*, and *Game of Thrones*, or **Netflix**’s *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *House of Cards*. And, as many of these are served up online, the notion of home entertainment has become a moving target, as consumers have progressed well beyond curating their own content to being able to choose where and when to consume it as well. (According to **Leichtman Research Group**, cable providers reported more broadband subscribers than cable TV subscribers at the end of 2014.) This level of consumer control has engendered an expectation that is out of step with the traditional cable model. Consumer complaints and a collective call for unbundling have peppered social media, blogs, and columns for a few years now, and it seems content producers have been listening.

I don’t want my MTV... or ESPN or FOX, but let me have HGTV, HBO, AMC, and the Food Network...

Producers and studios are entering the bundle/unbundle debate and leveraging the immediacy of the medium to their advantage as they have begun rolling out direct-to-viewer subscription programming.

continued on page 51



Your Library—eImagined for Health Sciences

- 24/7 user access to health science database
- eBook Database for fast content search
- Purchase and Patron Driven Acquisition models available
- Pay only once—for the life of the edition

Visit R2Library.com
Start your free 30 day trial today!

R₂ DIGITAL
LIBRARY

Visit R2Library.com to learn more
Or call us at 800.345.6425 x600

Rittenhouse Book Distributors, Inc.
511 Fehely Drive | King of Prussia, PA 19406
www.rittenhouse.com



Media-Centered from page 50

Borrowing from **Netflix's** model, **HBO** began testing the water by offering their **GO** service to affiliated cable subscribers, allowing them to access **HBO** programming (read — *Game of Thrones*) via streaming boxes or on their portable media. But, this did not address the non-cable subscriber's demand, so **HBO** cut the cord / broke the box and rolled out their **NOW** service. A monthly fee of \$14.99 provides consumers without cable subscriptions ample **HBO** premium programming. Add this to **Netflix's** already hugely popular streaming service, **Nickelodeon's** digital subscription package, **Sundance Now** and their new **Sundance Doc Club**, **CBS/Showtime's** soon-to-be-released direct digital service, **NBC's** plan to offer a subscription Web-based comedy service, **Verizon Communications' FiOS** custom TV's slim package service, and **Dish Network's** digital Sling TV package, and consumers now have a plethora of a la carte programming options from which to choose sans traditional cable. But what does that really mean? Instead of paying for both cable subscriptions packages and broadband access, will folks now just pay higher rates for more and faster broadband alongside these direct-to-viewer subscriptions? Is that really so different? Will there be a noticeable price reduction? Time may tell. But for now, it seems like more of a shift than a true change. And that brings me back to what impact this might have on media collections at our academic institutions, public libraries, and cultural centers.

Maybe Netflix has [actually] Revived the TV Star...

I have mentioned in previous articles that free streaming sites and subscription services like **Netflix**, **Amazon Prime**, **Hulu**, **Snag**, **Vudu**, **Crackle**, and now **HBOGO**, **HBO Now**, **Showtime Anytime**, **Starz Play**, **Verizon's FiOS**, and **Dish's Sling TV** can prove helpful resources. But they do not offer everything. Students and faculty are letting

us know that they are not finding all the materials they need for their classes on these sites. They experience best success when they use them *in tandem* with the Library's media collection. As assigned viewing continues to increase, so does the importance of our locally curated collection of media materials. This absolutely includes TV. Maybe not TV as we have understood it to be, but certainly the programs lending themselves to the renaissance golden age of TV we are experiencing today through the original programming being produced by **Netflix**, **HBO**, **Showtime**, **AMC**, **FX**, and **IFC** alongside traditional networks like **ABC**, **NBC**, and **CBS**. Our media collections currently include classic and essential TV shows from most every decade since Molly Goldberg shouted "Yoohoo" from her kitchen window. Undoubtedly, these collections reflect an ever-increasing roster of shows produced by cable networks like **HBO** and **Showtime** or online video outlets like **Netflix**. TV continues to resonate in the curriculum. Classes once dedicated to analyzing and deconstructing episodes of *M*A*S*H*, *All in the Family*, *Seinfeld*, and *The Simpsons* moved on to *The Wire*, *Sex and the City*, *The Sopranos*, and *Breaking Bad* and have now arrived at *Girls*, *Game of Thrones*, *Empire*, and *Mad Men*. Now more than ever, careful curation of our TV show collections must continue as the landscape continues to grow and change. As Don Draper from *Mad Men* recently asserted in the final season — "This is the beginning of something, not the end."

Some Shows to Consider (besides the obvious ones like Game of Thrones, Orange is the New Black, and Girls)...

Veep, *Penny Dreadful*, *Better Call Saul*, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *Bloodline*, *Broad City*, *Wayward Pines*, *Outlander*, *Louie*, *Orphan Black*, *Happyish*, *Fortitude*, *Empire*, *Shameless*, *Togetherness*, *The Americans*, *Daredevil*, *iZombie*, *Man Seeking Woman*, *12 Monkeys*, and *Wolf Hall*. 🐾