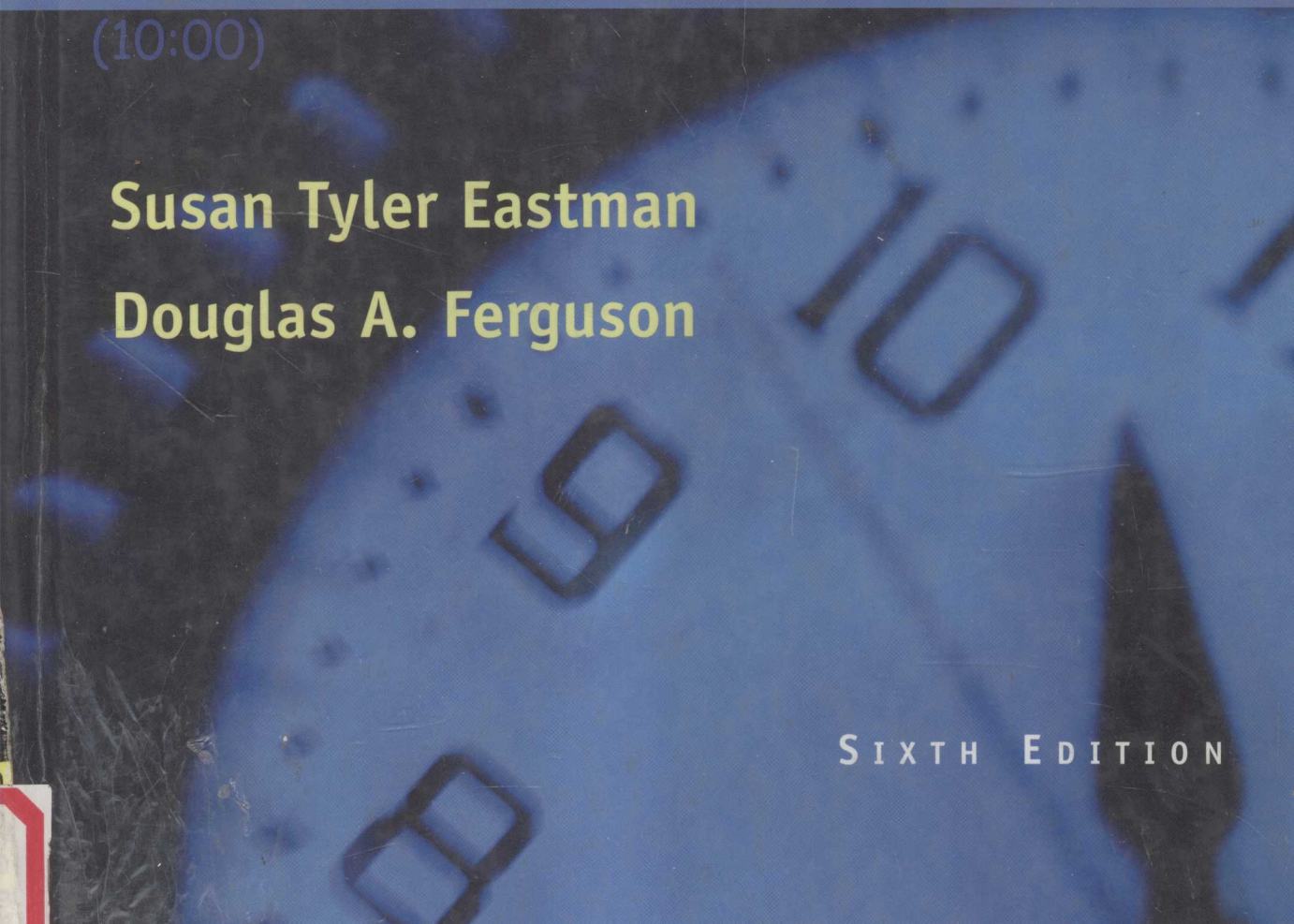
Broadcast/Cable/Web Programming

Strategies and Practices

Susan Tyler Eastman
Douglas A. Ferguson



SIXTH EDITION

Broadcast/Cable/Web Programming

Strategies and Practices Sixth Edition

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editor and friend extraordinaire.

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Preface

In the late 1970s, Lewis Klein and Sydney W. Head had the original inspiration that led to this book: They foresaw the need for a text on the strategies of programming in the television and radio industries to teach the upcoming generation of programmers. Their distinctive idea was that experienced professionals would contribute chapters because they could provide singular insights into what were then hidden-behind-the-scenes strategies and practices.

Lewis Klein and Sydney Head took their idea to Rebecca Hayden at Wadsworth Publishing Company, and in her inimitably wise way, she expressed optimism and gave the project the needed practical and logistical support. After adding a coeditor, the first edition appeared in 1981 under the title *Broadcast Programming: Strategies for Winning Television and Radio Audiences*, and it received a remarkable welcome in the academic community. The National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE) supported the book by encouraging participation by influential programmers and by conducting a survey of program executives that was reported in the first edition. The book and its editors received a Broadcast Preceptor's Award from San Francisco State University for their signal contribution to the industry and academia.

As the book moved through six editions, the content expanded to include cable, new media, and the Internet, and now the title has become *Broadcast/Cable/Web Programming: Strategies and Practices*. The contributors have evolved into a mix of practitioners and scholars; in addition to the two editors/authors, 11 professionals and academics have contributed to the chapters in the current edition. Both editors want to extend their warmest thanks to these people and to previous contributors. Our most enduring authors, William J. Adams, Edward G. Aiken, John W. Fuller, and Jeffrey C. Reiss wrote for five editions; and William Adams and John Fuller are still with us in this most recent edition. Nick Alexander, John A. Haldi, Edd Routt, Squire Rushnell, Timothy P. Meyer, and John von Soosten contributed to four editions, and the last two of them continue to actively participate in this edition, we are grateful to say. These are the experts who have helped establish this book as the definitive programming text in colleges and universities around the world.

We also need to thank our most recent reviewers who pointed us clearly toward the needed changes, especially Thomas R. Lindlof at the University of Kentucky and Edward J. Carlin at Shippensburg State University. We also appreciate the efforts of our editor at Wadsworth Publishing Company, Cathy Linberg. In addition, we wish to thank the many others who wrote and reviewed, especially including four recent contributors—Jeffrey Bernstein, Dwight E. Brooks, David Sedman, and Jeffrey S. Wilkinson.

All the people we have mentioned have left distinctive stamps on the book and helped it maintain its ability to look into the future of the media business insofar as changing conditions

affect the strategies and practices of programming. It is easy to claim that the future in the everchanging media business is unknowable, but with some prodding by the editors, for each new edition the authors managed to write in ways that remained applicable for five years or so into the future. This was a remarkable accomplishment, and we hope it continues into the present edition. The editor/authors wish to credit a great many people—only some of whom are acknowledged here—for their collective achievement.

Each time we do a new edition, my coauthors and I ask ourselves whether our subject matter is still what should be taught. Have new technologies come along that are so different in approaches and outcomes that traditional broadcast and cable programming strategies and practices are no longer relevant to the real world? The answer is threefold. First, current broadcasting is still the system that dominates all media, and students need to know how it works. Second, the current system will greatly influence the systems to come, just as print influenced radio, radio influenced television, and so on. Third, spelling out which influences will matter, which strategies will be copied, and which practices will become dinosaurs is the special contribution of this book. Our critics have inveighed against the "mechanical" approach to programming, saying that, behind all the words in this book, lies the hidden assumption that the practitioner who follows the stated guidelines will be successful. In response, we can agree that, at its highest levels, programming is part art, part science, and the art may be the most important part. At the station levels, where the competition may be fierce but the risks are relatively small, understanding and following the strategies and practices outlined in this book are probably the essential first steps to competence as a programmer—although innovation rarely hurts. In the emerging online industry, programming practices will alter greatly, evolving some exciting new strategies and innovative practices. Nonetheless, many media strategies will remain the same because they are driven by advertisers' needs. Moreover, the credible programmer will know where the lore of the field came from and be able to trace the ongoing process of changing assumptions and resulting practices.

In the five years since the fifth edition of this book, the assumptions and processes of programming have continued to evolve, especially under pressure from the Internet. Gigantic mergers among networks, program suppliers, cable operators, and telephone companies have altered the economics of the business. Additional broadcast television networks now compete for viewers, along with dozens of new cable networks, and the business has become increasingly global in all aspects. Digital compression, multiplexed satellite channels, and the arrival of high-definition television have transformed the processes of production, distribution, and reception. It is, however, the spread of daily Internet access in homes as well as businesses, accompanied by an immediate explosion in audio streaming and the first harbingers of streaming video, that has shaken up the traditional forces in the media business. Once again, predicting the media future challenges the most farsighted, and the eventual impact on programming of the changes that have already begun can only be guessed, but events so far have led to ten major changes for the sixth edition of *Broadcast/Cable/Web Programming:*

- The book's length has been shortened to 12 chapters, a practical amount for instruction in either quarters or semesters.
- A new element, promotion, has been added to the chapter by chapter focus on selection, scheduling, and evaluation.
- A more formal statement of the theory and model guiding the authors' thinking has been added to the first chapter, accompanied by basic descriptive information about the industry and about the viewing process to better meet the needs of teachers.
- A new chapter covering online video and audio programming has been added to reflect the dramatic changes already appearing in the industry.

- The topic of international syndication has been added to the chapter on domestic television syndication, and the subjects of wireless and satellite distribution have been added to the chapter on cable system programming.
- The topics of affiliate and independent television have been merged in a single chapter on television station programming to reflect the virtual disappearance of the unaffiliated station.
- The topics of network and syndicated radio have been spread into the chapters on music and information radio, reducing the total number of radio chapters but retaining essential content.
- The topics of basic and premium cable channels have been merged in a single chapter to better illustrate the workings of the industry and the interrelationships among cable program services.
- The sources listed at the end of each chapter now reveal a shift away from books and trade magazines to the web, in line with changing search practices.
- Finally, all chapters now close with sections on anticipated developments, spelling out "what lies ahead" in terms of industry trends and audience behaviors.

Despite these changes, the fundamental approach to the subject of programming that characterized previous editions has been retained. The editors remain convinced that there are assumptions about viewing, listening, and online usage that lead to widespread adoption of strategic approaches to media programming. Although we would never belittle the importance of innovation and creativity in programming, we assert that the majority of programmers—and those who direct and work with programmers—need familiarity with current practices in order to be accepted as professionals and to accomplish the everyday tasks of programming stations, networks, and services. Nonetheless, prodigious inspiration, fantastic ingenuity, and great sagacity will be needed to cope with the enormous impact the Internet will undoubtedly have on the ways people access, consume, and utilize media in the coming decade, and we hope what is written here will be a catalyst for new programming strategies and practices.

Susan Tyler Eastman
Douglas A. Ferguson

Brief Contents

Detailed Contents

PART ONE

Programming Resources and Constraints

American homes typically have three or more television sets and two or more VCRs or DVD players, and the sets are on about seven hours a day. Adults watch more than five hours of television daily and listen to nearly two hours of radio; children and teens watch television about three and a half hours daily, and teens consume five or more daily hours of radio. In addition, people who have computers use them an average of nearly two hours daily in the home (as well as in offices), and some of that use is to look at television-like programs and promotion for those programs, as well as to listen to radio stations. Thus, television, radio, and the Internet play crucial roles as sources of entertainment and information in the lives of Americans, and they have a tremendous impact on the culture and social practices. This book explains how programs get on the broadcast, cable/satellite, and online media, who makes them, why they are the way they are, and what limits operate on programmers and management. It reveals the strategies of network, station, and system programmers and describes common industry practices. Although the book zooms in on the strategies and practices used right now in the first decade of the twenty-first century, each chapter concludes with a section on what lies ahead—the trends and expected developments that will soon affect programmers.

Part One consists of three chapters covering a lot of territory very quickly. Their collective goal is to provide an extended framework for understanding the complexities of specific situations in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the major **concepts and vocabulary of programming strategy.** It lays the groundwork for conceptualizing the essential nature of the programming function. Despite the tremendous variety of programming situations in broadcasting and cable, all programmers face similar problems and approach them with similar strategies. Although online practices may differ in many respects, they generally derive from the audience's experience with traditional television. The common assumptions that underlie all programming behaviors can be understood by examining the programmer's options in light of the lore of the field. Some constraints operating on programming decisions are beyond the programmer's immediate control; others leave room for exercise of the programmer's skills. In this chapter, the authors begin by defining programming in several ways, providing background on the industry, and spelling out the theoretical model underlying this book's contents. Then they detail the range of skills and types of knowledge that programmers need, including some preliminary discussions of

the impact of economics, ownership, regulations, and ethics on programming.

Chapter 2 introduces the major concepts of **program and audience ratings,** vital to understanding programming strategies. Many programming behaviors depend on assumptions about how ratings are collected and presented. In this chapter, the authors explain the qualitative and quantitative research tools of broadcasting and cable, showing how they can be put to use by programmers. The chapter focuses on national and local market ratings because they are the industry's primary method of program evaluation. Ratings are the agreed-on measure of success or failure, and as such, provide the means for setting advertising rates. Then, the authors describe the specialized tools of Internet audience measurement and show the ways in which they are equivalent to and different from traditional ratings measurements. Chapters 3, 4, 7, 10, and 11 supplement this discussion by disclosing specialized data-collection methods and reviewing the kinds of research and ratings reports used in particular parts of the industry. Chapter 2 provides a basic understanding of how the industry evaluates programs and audiences and lays the foundation for further exploration.

Chapter 3 deals with the all-important topic of **program syndication inside and outside the United States.** It begins by following the syndication process from initial production of a program to station purchase, tracing the roles of the major participants in the domestic syndication business. It then outlines the influences of international program syndication on this process. The author goes through the process of making a deal for a first-run or off-network program and the influence of station representative firms in helping their client stations purchase and schedule programs. The role of ratings in decision making about program purchase and scheduling is made clear, and many of the specialized research reports available to programmers and syndicators are explained. The mechanisms of negotiation, bidding, and pricing are described, along with methods of paying for programs. These concepts and practices are especially important to understanding broadcast television programming as it relates to the strategies and practices of network-affiliated stations. These ideas also influence the programmers of the broadcast and cable networks (and will soon influence web programmers as well).

The three chapters making up **Part One** reveal many of the vital components of programming strategies. They supply an overview of programming ideas and tools that will be useful for interpreting the more specialized chapters in the rest of the book.

Chapter 1

A Framework for Programming Strategies

Douglas A. Ferguson and Susan Tyler Eastman

A GUIDE TO CHAPTER 1

In the media world, programming is the software that gives the hardware a reason for existing. Both are necessary for the system to work, but without programming no broadcasting or wired services would exist. Programmers sincerely believe that "content is king."

WHAT IS PROGRAMMING?

This chapter and the ones that follow introduce the realm of programming. Programming can describe either a *group of programs* on a radio station, television channel, or web site, as in "I really enjoy the programming on that new channel," or *the act of choosing and scheduling programs* on a broadcast station, subscribed channel, or the web, as in "I do most of the programming at this station."

Thus, programming can refer to an outcome or a process. *The processes of selecting, scheduling, promoting, and evaluating programs define the work of a programmer.* Whether designated a program director, program manager, or operations manager, the person's job will be to choose the programs that target the desired audience, then design a schedule for them, make sure they are effectively marketed, and then monitor the outcome.[1] If a station has weak programming, then the outcome may seem more important than the process. Such a station needs new programming, in the most tangible sense, because owners always seek large audiences for stations' advertisers. The new shows the programmers choose must appeal to more viewers (or listeners, in the case of radio, or users, in the case of web sites) than did the old shows.

Distribution of programming is a lot less important than one might believe, but a programmer should understand the different means for getting programs to the consumer. The basic distinction is *wired* versus *broadcast*. Wired communication takes place over a coaxial or fiber optic cable, which can come from a cable company or a telephone company (telco). Broadcast signals are typically transmitted over-the-air from radio (AM and FM) and television stations (VHF and UHF), but the use of special high-frequency signals also fits the definition of broadcasting. A common example is *direct broadcasting*, referring to services that transmit programs from geostationary orbiting transmitters to small receiving dishes. These services are described in Chapter 8. Finally, content may be distributed over the Internet in audio and in streaming video (see Chapter 10).

The Process of Programming

Programming is not rocket science or brain surgery, but being successful at programming is still highly challenging. The primary goal in programming is to *maximize the size of an audience targeted by advertisers*. The only way to accomplish this goal is to satisfy the needs and wants of that audience.

In the case of **mass-appeal channels**, such as the major television networks and basic cable channels, programmers want as many viewers as possible. Ideally, the demographic characteristics popular with various advertisers will be well-represented in the total audience. In the case of specialty cable channels (called **niche networks**) such as the History Channel or Black Entertainment Television, the programmer may be more interested in pleasing the target audience than in expanding audience size. Of course, the larger the size of the target audience, the easier it is to make money.

All programmers must deal with certain limitations, most of them economic. Program resources are scarce. Good shows cost a lot of money. Unfortunately, bad shows are also expensive. Good or bad, each of the big four networks spends more than $100 billion annually on programs and rights to events, but audiences are scarce in terms of time and money. Viewers, listeners, and users are available to consume the media for only so many hours per day. In the case of television programming for which viewers pay a fee, there is a limit to how much they will spend before they start complaining to Congress about subscription fees.

Box 1.1 illustrates the not-always-happy relationship between television viewers and television program services as a tug of war, and similar pic-