



News Unlikely to Fill TV Strike Holes

By DAVID BAUDER – December 23, 2007

NEW YORK (AP) — To prepare for a prolonged writers strike, television networks have stockpiled a gladiator battle, a lie-detector game, a remade "Password," a celebrity "Apprentice" and a competition for aspiring Pussycat Dolls.

Among the new shows to roll out in prime-time this winter, what's the one programming genre the broadcasters are virtually ignoring?

The news.

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"It's not surprising that you're not seeing news filling the gap caused by the writers' strike," said Robert Lichter, president of the Center for Media and Public Affairs. "More and more, the networks are only about whatever sells. They used to genuflect in the direction of the public interest. Now they only bow down before money."

The programming plans are also a reflection of how much the business has changed in the decade since "Dateline NBC" was on that network's schedule five nights a week, even when the writers were working.

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News programming that presses to be entertaining "has the fate of all entertainment programs — they fall out of fashion," Lichter said.

Many network executives believe that the cable news networks are there to satisfy people interested in news during prime-time. CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC will all devote many hours to covering the presidential campaign during 2008.

Corporate politics may also play a hidden role in driving the broadcast networks away from news. Prime-time schedules are drawn up by executives on the West Coast with an entertainment background, and may not want to cede control of hours on their schedules to news executives in New York. The rise of a new generation of executives who made their marks in reality programming — like new NBC entertainment chief Ben Silverman — argue for those trends continuing.

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