

Understanding TV Upfronts

Understanding Television: Upfronts

One of the rules in media literacy is that every medium has its own language. And never is that more true than in TV. The word “upfront” has been around quite a while. And even though there is a definition below, the actual meaning has started to change. (Words like Newfront and Allfront are becoming commonplace because of the changing nature of the industry.)

Change is in the air because traditional network TV and cable has some company. And that company comes in the form of streaming services such as Hulu, Netflix, Amazon and a host of others who are producing and distributing new programming outside the traditional rules, boundaries (and calendars) of mainstream TV.

What are upfronts? “when advertisers have a chance to buy ad time on the network up front or before a season begins. It’s this time frame that the TV ad time is sold at a discounted rate.” ([Source](#))

“The (broadcast and cable TV’s) presentations (to advertisers) are really only the start of the upfront process. Typically, after the networks make their presentations, the sales executives take over, beginning negotiations with (ad) agencies, who are bargaining on behalf of marketers, about buying commercial time in advance for the coming season. (That is how “upfront” gets its name, as the dealing happens ahead of time.)

The New York Times offers [this explanation](#) of this annual event:

The word “upfronts” is shorthand for an annual rite of passage for television networks and the industry that operates in orbit around them.

It generally refers to three activities:

- No. 1: The unveiling of new television network schedules
- No. 2: The cajoling of advertisers by the networks
- No. 3: The selling of billions of dollars in advertising time

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