

UnboxingTV: extensions of television content, platforms, audiences, and...
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In my own ruminations on how to unbox TV, I keep coming back to the notion that greatest television boxing match this year is taking place in conference rooms and in executive offices around Los Angeles—places where television cameras are not allowed. On October 31st, the Writers Guild of America's contract expires with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), and by all predictions this will be a heavyweight match. The upcoming contract negotiations this year for three of the major guilds—on the 31st for the WGA and in June 2008 for the DGA and SAG—will affect what we will be seeing (or not seeing) on our screens this next year. With the WGA contract deadline expiring the same week our Unboxing TV proposals are due, I thought I would take this double deadline as a serendipitous opportunity to articulate a few of the ways that the television industry itself is at this moment debating in board rooms, meeting halls, and offices the extensions of television content, platforms, audiences, and...

The flow of television has often blurred the line between content and commercial, from the merry Texaco men to *Queer* men selling straight men on designer clothes and furniture. Yes, television in the U.S. is a commercial medium, but a key issue under debate in Hollywood right now is the narrowing line between program and promotion.¹ The critical distinction for the WGA is between product placement and product integration. Writers are demanding consultation rights on brand integration, and are even arguing that audiences should be notified when branding has been interwoven into scripted programming. Writers have even solicited the FCC to rule that product integration without notification violates television's public interest tenant.²

With the extension of television's boxes and screens, defining jurisdictional lines and establishing compensation rates across media platforms become central not only to how the industry conceives of itself and its future, but also how they hope to profit from the media. The AMPTP's original proposal suggested a three year extension of the current contract in order to have time to conduct a study of new media profits and devise a business model for calculating appropriate compensation amid the proliferation of new media outlets. The WGA roundly rejected the proposal, and, in their own proposal,

defined a new residual system to replace the now 40-year old system. As well, in imagining this transmedia landscape, the WGA is proposing to include all writing for animation, cable, reality, as well as new media content (such as webisodes and mobisodes) under WGA jurisdiction.

A new system of audience measurement was unveiled this year at the May Upfronts in New York.³ With the “live plus three” ratings model, the broadcast industry is attempting to extend its viewing numbers to regain audiences lost to broadcasting revenues from DVR viewing. But adding back in delayed viewing, the networks can charge advertisers by counting playback within 72 hours of the live broadcast. This time-shifted rating extends industry and advertisers viewership from 6-7% within the targeted 18-49 audience.⁴

The biggest new show this season is *Pushing Daisies*, the World Series will lure in big audiences, and *Dancing With the Stars* is again causing a stir, but I’d argue that this year’s AMPTP-Guild contract negotiations might turn out to be the greatest television drama, sports match-up, and reality programming of the season.

¹ Jon Lafayette, “Product Placement Growing: Most Recent Numbers Total \$1.5 Billion,” *TV Week* (28 March 2007).

² John Eggerton and Ben Grossman, “WGA Pushed Branded Integration Identification: FCC Chairman Martin Already Circulated Proposal,” *Broadcasting & Cable* (20 September 2007).

³ Stuart Elliot, “Watching a Show Live, With 72 Hours to Do It” *New York Times*, 17 May 2007.

⁴ Kevin Downey, “From TiVo, better data on ad skipping,” *Media Life Research* (24 April 2007).