



Leverage the **power** and **profitability** of **Web video!**

## News

---

March 16, 2008 8:45 PM

---

### Keeping a Weather Eye on TV Habits

Media Buyers Should Note Potential Effects of Early Spring on Viewership

By Mark Dominiak, Special to TelevisionWeek

---

Upon arriving home one day last week, my youngest daughter noticed a flier attached to the door. Undaunted by falling flurries and temperatures below 20 degrees, she ran ahead to the door to grab the flier.

Before peeling off her boots and parka, she opened up the flier to see what it was, then started laughing.

“Dad, somebody wants us to hire them to cut our grass. It’s freezing outside.” She thought it was pretty funny. Ever the marketer, I asked, “Why do you think they put that on our door?”

She quickly grasped the situation. “Well, it will be spring really soon and then the grass will be growing and they figure people will need help cutting their grass.” Ah, the proud father. She had a good grasp of messaging to lead the season.

Upon reflection, that small occurrence prompted an interesting train of thought for me.

#### Breaking Cabin Fever

Chicago has had its second-worst winter snowfall in 30 years, and it’s not the only area of the country that’s experiencing a difficult winter. Cleveland got hammered by 14 inches of snow thanks to a storm system that prompted more than 600 traffic accidents on Ohio roads. There have been storms in the Great Plains states and floods and many horrible tornados in the South, far in advance of tornado season.

Cabin fever is setting in for many people who have been inundated with bad weather this winter. What does this have to do with media? Here’s an example that will provide some food for thought.

Many years ago, I worked on a retail fast-food account with a heavy spot television component to its plans. We purchased healthy weight levels in 150 markets every quarter. One second quarter, more than 40 markets delivered woefully fewer impressions than the executed buy. Underdelivery was so bad that the client requested a deeper level of explanation as part of the post-buy process.

In the assessment process, the team sensed that weather had something to do with the problem. That particular year, the second quarter had been unusually temperate. Winter weather had broken early in many markets, providing people with the unexpected opportunity to enjoy the outdoors much earlier than they were accustomed to do.

We asked the National Weather Service for market-by-market data, including data for the second quarter in question and historical data for the period going back many years. We looked at historic average temperatures for the quarter and specific temperatures in each purchased market for the same quarter.

Differences in temperature between the current quarter and history were ranked from highest positive temperature difference to lowest. What we discovered was eye-opening: Almost all of the underperforming markets appeared in the top of the rankings, meaning our 40-plus underdelivering markets led the country in unexpected temperate conditions.

People were out and about earlier and more often in those markets than in the rest of the country. Those out-and-about hours meant significant decreases in homes using television and persons using television for the duration of the quarter. Faced with the option of out-of-home activity or television viewing, people seemed to have gone with the good weather.

### **Spring Possibilities**

While it would be a guess at this point to predict the coming spring's weather, one thing seems a safe bet: People around the country are weary of this winter's weather. It's likely that many folks will be ready to break out as soon as the weather itself breaks.

Add to a rough winter the lingering effects of the writers strike on viewers. The lack of new content has affected television viewing rituals, and as a result viewers don't seem as vested in this season. One can make a substantive argument that programming is less sticky this spring than it has been in years past and may remain so even if networks are able to bring new episodes to the air. With bad weather breaking and no strong content pull, second-quarter viewing levels could be problematic.

Aware of that possibility, it might make sense for planners to revisit media plans. Is there flexibility in existing plans to react to likely reduced viewing in the spring? If not, how can decreased viewing be accounted for in the media plan? What alterations can be engineered into the plan to exploit to a brand's advantage the behavior of consumers breaking out of cabin fever?

### **Options in Television**

Just because consumers may rush to embrace the outdoors when winter weather breaks doesn't mean television should be abandoned. People won't stop viewing television; they will just change their viewing behavior.

Work weeks may see things like outdoor exercise in the morning and out-of-home activities after work before sunset. Weekends would likely see more out-of-home activity in the heart of the day as cocooning is put aside in favor of other activities. Even folks inclined to be homebodies may shift activities from inside-based to those that are outside, such as sprucing up the yard or doing some work on the outside of the house.

Sunlight hours will affect behaviors greatly, so planners should take care to assess earlier dayparts or when their prime units run. Prime-time viewing always tends to build through the evening and peak late. Planners should expect a slower build and a lower peak. Late prime-time content probably will be more favorable than early content.

Late news will provide a good alternative if it's not already in a plan. People returning home from outside activity still tend to touch base before they turn in, and late news likely will suffer less as a daypart.

While some might suggest a dose of outdoor activity and fresh air will wear folks out, it's also likely all that extra activity will energize people and keep them awake for a bit longer than during sleepy, cold winter evenings. In that case, late fringe programming may make some sense.

People who want it all won't chose between indoors and outdoors; they'll try to do both. The ability to time-shift may lead to a bit more DVR use than during the winter. Planners may take extra care to ensure high-engagement programs remain on the buy even if they occur in earlier prime hours. Or, planners could take advantage of digital content offerings and shift units from on-air to Internet impressions.

### Alternatives to Television

Another good exercise for planners to undertake would be to account for the core change of consumer behavior from indoor to outdoor activity: Take a step back and think about what types of activities consumers may be engaging in and understand what types of media might have increased significance at those contact points.

Starting with the unconventional, mobile media alternatives might be a good choice. Consumers will themselves be mobile and will likely have a contact opportunity strapped at their side or in their purse or pocket. E-mail, text and other tactics may make a lot of sense for increasingly on-the-go prospects.

Somewhat more conventional options like radio and outdoor become more relevant when consumer behavior moves out of the home. Considering consumers will be out and about in the environment, these media types may take on even more importance, as they could be used as a call to action to move prospects one step closer to a potential product purchase. Using outdoor to direct people to retail or radio to deliver a promotional offer might have a positive impact.

Cinema advertising is also a strong option to consider, especially if your brand has a highly engaging creative unit at its disposal. May tends to be one of the larger box office months and the past winter may provide positive momentum going in. Add to that hot properties like "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" opening May 22 and there should be plenty of spring fever in the air.

While nothing is a foregone conclusion, it's shaping up to be a depressing end of the season for the networks. This winter has been particularly harsh for many people across the country. Cabin fever seems to be very high and people can't wait to get active. A strike that undermined many people's viewing habits didn't help to give viewers reasons to remain engaged with television content.

In that light, brands with plans that are relying significantly on broadcast to deliver impact in the spring may want to reassess them. While there may not be a need to re-engineer plans completely, now is the time to identify potential weak points and revise plans to ensure needed impact isn't lost when cabin fever breaks.

*Mark Dominiak is principal strategist of marketing, communication and context for Insight Garden.*

[Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#) | [RSS](#) | [Share](#)

Tags: [Print Edition](#)

---