

Ovation Posts Brava Upfront Performance

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After refreshing its brand in the spring and making a significant investment in on-air programming, the arts and culture network Ovation enjoyed its most lucrative upfront season to date, lifting total dollar volume by 50 percent.

According to Liz Janneman, senior vp, advertising sales, Ovation, the network “more than tripled” the number of advertisers it did business in last year’s bazaar, as clients were drawn in by centerpiece stunts like the film series American Revolutionaries: The Directors and “the strength and conviction of the arts category.”

Launched on July 1, the month-long prime time series includes screenings of films such as Quentin Tarantino’s Reservoir Dogs, Sofia Coppola’s The Virgin Suicides and David Lynch’s Lost Highway. Throughout the screenings, directors Peter Bogdanovich and Roger Corman are on hand to provide analysis, historical context and insight into the future of independent cinema.

Among the categories that were particularly strong for Ovation in the upfront are: automotive, retail, CPG, travel and insurance. Returning sponsors include Revlon, Pfizer, Chase, Subaru, SC Johnson and Walmart.

The 2010-11 upfront marks the last in which Ovation will trade as an unrated property. Having reached the **42 million subscriber** mark in June, Ovation aims to begin making guarantees against Nielsen ratings in the fourth quarter of 2010.

Given its size and status as an independently owned cable channel that reaches an older audience, Ovation sells a good deal of inventory in calendar-year deals. “As a standalone network, we have to live and die on our own merits,” Janneman said. “We’re not fully mature in terms of distribution, but we’re growing quickly...and reaching a very engaged, upscale demo.”

First launched as Ovation TV in 1996, the network’s rebirth began four years ago, when a clutch of investors led by Hubbard Media Group purchased the arts channel for some \$55 million. At the time, Ovation reached just 5 million homes. This spring saw the brand jettison the “TV” suffix and introduce a new logo and on-air look.

Per SNL Kagan estimates, **Ovation last year took in \$13.5 million in net ad sales, up 13 percent from \$12 million in 2008.**