

TELEVISION

Best fall syndie bet: 'Ellen DeGeneres'

Buyers: Sharon Osbourne who? Fergie AWOL.

By Kevin Downey

A handful of new syndicated talk shows will start rolling out next month, but only one stands a good chance of making it through to season-two: "The Ellen DeGeneres Show."

Although media buyers don't think "Ellen" will have the type of success that "Dr. Phil" did when it became the No. 2 talk show in its first season last year, it is expected to far outperform other new talk shows.

"Sharon Osbourne," for instance, is already in trouble and morning chat show "Living It Up! With Ali and Jack" faces stiff competition.

Meanwhile, the show "Fergie" with Sarah Ferguson has been sidelined--perhaps permanently--while another program set to launch in January with "American Idol's" Ryan Seacrest is still in development.

"Ellen," like "Rosie O'Donnell" before it, is a talk/variety show with a host with a proven track record, including a stint hosting the Emmy Awards. The show also has the advantage of having key daytime slots on NBC affiliates in major markets.

"'Ellen' has a lot of positive buzz behind it, and I think the stations are very excited about it, and I know most of our advertisers are as well," says Terri McKinzie, assistant media director at Starcom Worldwide.

"Our one little concern is whether Middle America will have problems with Ellen. But the practice tapes we've seen indicate that it will be a very appealing program."

"Ellen's" biggest obstacle is the "Wayne Brady Show," which it will compete with in some markets.

"Wayne Brady" has a similar format and the advantage of going into its second season with an established audience. The show had a gradual rollout last season but will be seen across the country starting next month.

"I think 'Wayne Brady' has been a little bit overlooked," says McKinzie. "It might be a dark horse coming into the new season."

While "Ellen" has its work cut out for it, "Living It Up!



With Ali and Jack” is facing an even more daunting challenge. It will compete in most markets directly with the high-rated and long running “Live with Regis and Kelly.”

“Ali and Jack” is taking “Martha Stewart Living’s” morning slot on some CBS affiliates.

That will work to its advantage, but the show will have to lure entrenched viewers away from “Regis and Kelly,” the No. 3 talk show with a 3.5 household rating.

“The other issue with them going up against ‘Regis and Kelly’ is that they are trying to utilize the same formula, where you have the two personalities playing off each other,” says Brian Hughes, senior research analyst at Initiative.

“That market is sort of cornered by ‘Regis and Kelly,’ so that show will definitely have a big challenge.”

Meanwhile, few media people have big expectations for “Sharon Osbourne.”

The show, which is set to premiere in less than a month, has been plagued by problems. Osbourne is reportedly at odds with the show’s producers over the format and topics that will be covered.

As of now, “Sharon Osbourne” looks to be a talk show tackling serious topics geared to young adults.

“The real question on ‘Sharon Osbourne’ will be whether or not what the audience expects to see is what they get,” says Bill Carroll, vice president and director of programming at the Katz Television Group.

“If their expectations are met and the audience can relate to her, even if she is not the most polished interviewer, the show will do reasonably well.”

While Ryan Seacrest develops his show, the little-known “Ask Rita” with Rita Rudner is going into its first full season this September.

Like “Wayne,” the show had a gradual launch last season. Unlike “Wayne,” though, it has mostly been relegated to late night slots.

“Ask Rita” runs on some ABC affiliates and resembles ABC’s canceled “Politically Incorrect.”

The show pulled a 0.3 rating in its abbreviated run last season, but should do better as it expands to 84 percent of the country this fall.

“That show will be challenged all year,” says McKinzie. “Yet we like the host and we like the format, so we are optimistic that it will do well.”

SYNDICATED TALK SHOWS

Full Season 2002/03*

Rating & Audience

<u>Program</u>	<u>Rating %</u>	<u>Households</u> (000s)	<u>People</u> (000s)
OPRAH WINFREY SHOW	5.8	6,163	7,253
DR. PHIL SHOW	4.7	4,965	5,790
LIVE WITH REGIS AND KELLY	3.5	3,746	4,406
MAURY	3.2	3,387	4,244
MONTEL WILLIAMS	2.5	2,640	3,187
JERRY SPRINGER	2.5	2,704	3,322
JENNY JONES SHOW	1.7	1,771	2,140
RICKI LAKE	1.7	1,779	2,207
JOHN WALSH	1.4	1,453	1,714
ROB NELSON SHOW	1.0	1,080	1,311
GOOD DAY LIVE	1.0	1,019	1,202
CAROLINE RHEA	0.9	988	1,184
ASK RITA	0.3	358	405

* August 26, 2002 - July 27, 2003
Source: Nielsen Media Research

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