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## Television trying new ways to gain viewership

Television networks have seen large viewership declines during the past 20 years. To change the trend, broadcasters are trying new and creative outreach promotions that are low tech - interacting directly with viewers without use of a cell phone or computer. A new trend is creative, tactile, and individual interactions for engaging new audiences - broadcast television networks reach out to the community rather than waiting for viewers to come to them.

For example, Borders in Northridge hosted an unusual three-hour book signing this September; it was actually a promotion for ABC's detective hour, *Castle*. *Castle* features a crime novelist (Nathan Fillion as Castle) who shadows a female police investigator to solve cases. Simultaneously, the storyline has Castle researching the detective herself to create a protagonist for a new book, *Heat Wave*. To promote the show, ABC and Hyperion Books actually published a novel called *Heat Wave* by Richard Castle.

During the past three seasons, ABC has been proactive with creative audience participation beyond online services like Twitter and Facebook. The network has taken over grocery store parking lots. At Trader Joe's in Fallbrook Mall, one promotion involved covering parking space divider stripes with plastic signage telling people to watch *Desperate Housewives* or *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*. A street team went along to personally hand out magnetized *Housewives* grocery list forms and to tell shoppers to watch ABC.

Other networks also want to engage the audience face to face. Perhaps the biggest promotion of the year is Comic-Con in San Diego each July. The studios and networks are well represented at this massive fan convention featuring panel discussions and signings. The cast of CBS' *Big Bang Theory* acknowledged its fans from the event by mentioning the conference in the show's season premiere. Fans pay \$100 for the four day event and come away with *Big Bang Theory* mouse pads or T shirts among the many free souvenirs.

NBC/Universal promoted a 3D version of its *Chuck* spy/sci fi spoof February 2 with 125,000 pairs of cardboard 3D glasses given free at local Vons, Ralphs, Kmart, and Fry's stores. It was a tie-in with Intel, PepsiCo's SoBe soft drink, and the DreamWorks film *Monsters v. Aliens*. Potentially the program brought grocery shoppers and animation fans to the NBC family comedy.

The CW Network recently focused its face to face promotional efforts on young adults. CW and the American Red Cross promoted the new series *The Vampire Diaries* along with 230 universities and colleges. Blood drives were planned to help communities and create awareness with potential audience members. The efforts resulted in larger than expected premiere night ratings. Future fans received dental floss and fangs with the show's name.

Back at Borders, *Castle's* producers stood by the table as the actor sat and signed each book's title page "Nathan Fillion." For a \$20 entrance fee, about 250 participants met a TV star, took home a photo on their own camera, and garnered a personalized signed book with the message "Watch Castle on ABC" printed on the front and back covers. The question remains: if Richard Castle is a fictional character, then who wrote the book?