

2009 Jay Chiat Awards

Category: Media/Communications Strategy

Client: SCI FI Channel

Brand: *Battlestar Galactica*

Title: How *Battlestar Galactica* Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the DVR



How *Battlestar Galactica* Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the DVR



Summary

As SCI FI Channel's *Battlestar Galactica* entered its 4th and final season, the buzz and critical acclaim for the show were louder than ever. But despite its high cultural profile, audience ratings were down 31%—and in the TV business, when your audience is down, so are your profits.

The business challenge was to understand how this paradox came to be, and then figure out how communications could help solve it. When we dug into the numbers, we discovered that when time-shifted DVR viewing was accounted for, *Battlestar's* audience had in fact decreased by only 7%, not 31%. But even after we found those "missing" viewers, we still had to break them from their DVR habit. From a business perspective, if those 24% of viewers aren't watching the show live, or within three days on their DVRs, SCI FI Channel doesn't make any money selling them to advertisers. This became the basis for our communications strategy: to Incentivize Live Viewing. We weren't going to raise awareness of *what* to watch; rather, we were going to change behavior about *when* and *how* to watch. Every tactic would use communications to add value to the live viewing experience.

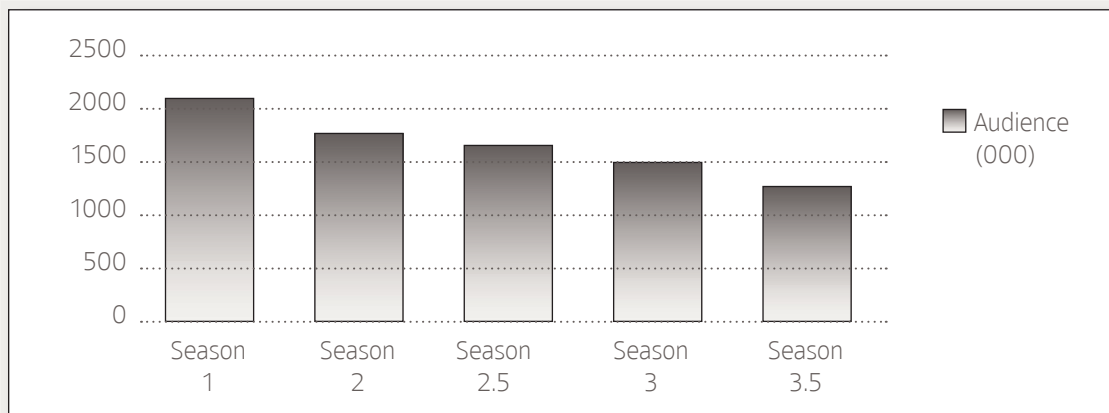
The Business Challenge

As the premiere for *Battlestar Galactica*'s final season approached, you'd think the marketing department at the SCI FI Channel would be thrilled. After all, with a combination of pop culture buzz and critical acclaim, the network's signature show seemed to be flying high. But despite all the outward signs of success, the business realities of *Battlestar Galactica* as it entered its 4th and final season were not what they used to be.



Cable networks like the SCI FI Channel are in the business of selling audiences. The bigger the audience, the more money they can charge for commercial time. And with a show like *Battlestar Galactica*, whose audience consists largely of hard-to-reach affluent men, the scarcity of that audience allows the network to charge even more.

So what was there to worry about? Well, even though the show still drew a larger audience than almost every other show on cable, *Battlestar's* ratings had been sinking steadily from season to season. This despite the fact that buzz about *Battlestar* was louder than ever.



So why, if so many people were talking about the show, weren't they watching like they used to?

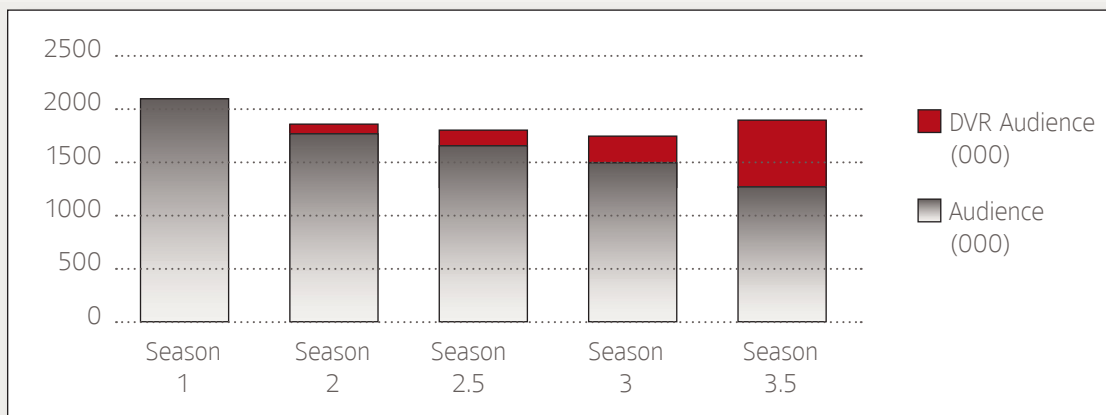
Our planning process began by looking for an answer to this question.

Uncovering the Truth in the Numbers

We had known all along that *Battlestar* was one of the most frequently recorded shows on DVRs (Digital Video Recorders, such as TiVo). According to Simmons NCS, the *Battlestar* audience is 85% more likely than average to be a heavy DVR user. But when we dug into the numbers, we learned just how much of an impact our audience's DVR habit was having:

- On average, *Battlestar's* DVR recording had gone up 123% per season since Season 1.
- Over this same period, audience ratings had declined by 31%.

It was only when we put these two findings together that we realized what was really going on. As it turned out, *Battlestar's* audience hadn't actually declined by 31% after all. Most of the show's missing audience was still watching, but their viewing behavior had changed, and now they were watching the show later on their DVRs. Once we accounted for all those DVR users, we saw that *Battlestar's* audience had actually only declined by 7%. Problem was, by watching the show later on their DVRs, those 24% of viewers weren't being counted in the ratings.



The Challenge for Communications

While it was great to learn that our audience hadn't actually disappeared, this still didn't solve our business problem. Yes, we'd found the "missing" 24% of our audience. But if those people weren't going to watch the show live, or play it back on their DVRs within the industry's Live +3 day ratings window, SCI FI Channel wouldn't make any money selling them to its advertisers. We needed to find a way to change their viewing behavior, or we might as well not have found them in the first place.

So in the Connection Brief, the challenge we outlined was to target those 24% who watch the show on their DVRs, and use communications to motivate them to start watching live, or at least closer to live, instead. This wasn't a standard brief about raising awareness of *what* to watch; rather, it was a brief aimed at changing behavior about *when* and *how* to watch.

The Communications Strategy

Out of this, the communications strategy became to Incentivize Live Viewing. In demonstrable ways, each tactic would have to serve as an incentive; it would have to add some sort of value to the live viewing experience for our 24% who otherwise preferred to watch the show on their DVRs.

Our Live-Viewing Tool Belt of Media and Communications Tactics

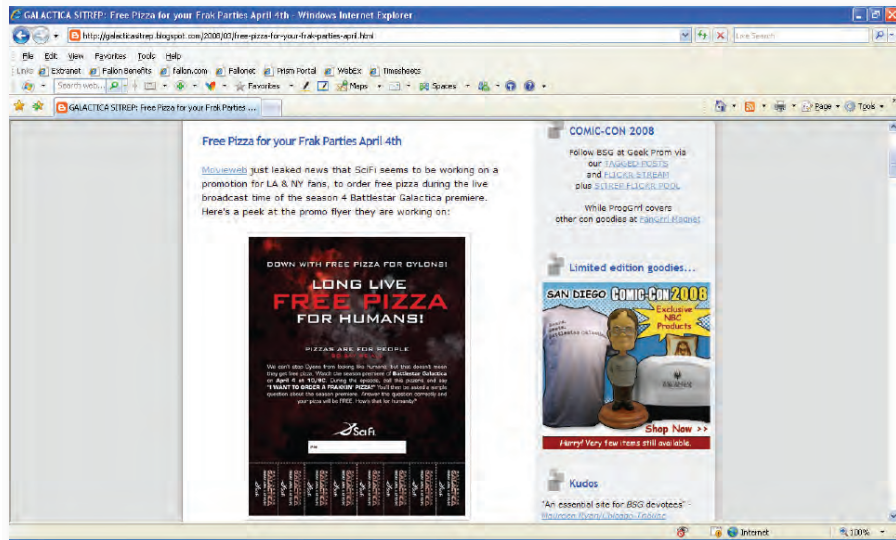
“Get The Frak Off The Web” Blackout:

With this idea, we managed to convince a media business to send its hard-earned audience off so they could spend time with another media business instead. We literally blacked out UGO.com, one of the most popular gaming sites on the Web, during the premiere of *Battlestar Galactica*. Since this was a place our audience might likely be on premiere night instead of watching the show, we met them there with a simple but motivating message via a full-screen takeover ad on the homepage: “Get The Frak Off The Web!” (For the uninitiated, “frak” is commonly used *Battlestar*-speak for a similar sounding four-letter word.) Why on earth would UGO.com agree to this? Because they themselves were planning to watch!



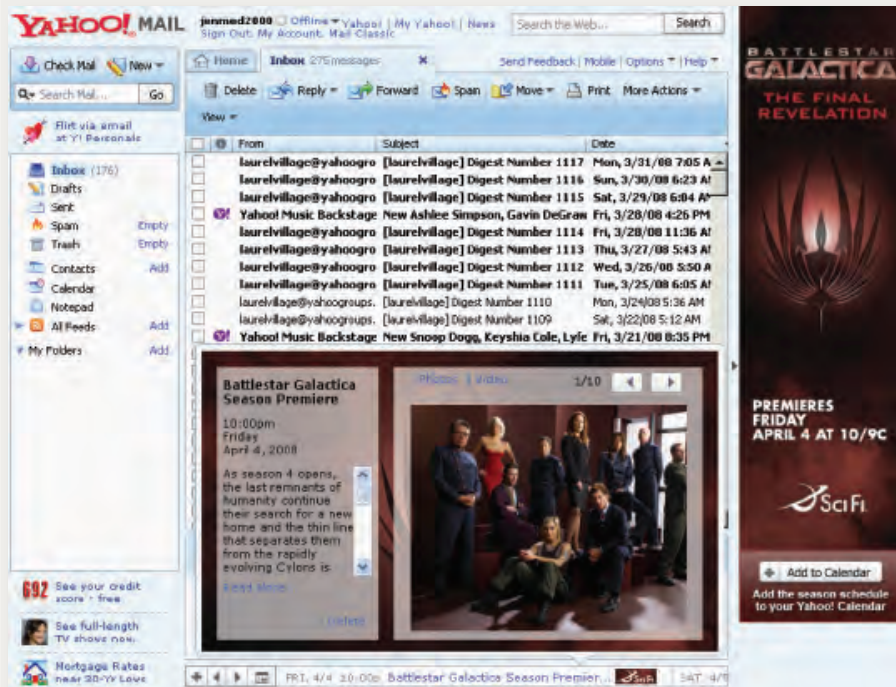
“I Want To Order a Frakking Pizza” Giveaway:

We partnered with pizzerias in New York and Los Angeles to give free pizzas to people who called while watching the live premiere. All they had to say was, “I want to order a frakking pizza,” to which they were asked a question that was to be answered in the first 10 minutes of the premiere. If they answered correctly, they got their free pizza delivered before the show was over. We spread rumors about this idea on top *Battlestar Galactica* blogs to generate interest and buzz nationwide.



Yahoo Mail Save-the-Date Reminders:

We used the “Event Driver” functionality on Yahoo Mail to help viewers remember to tune in to the premiere. A rich media ad unit directed Yahoo Mail users to add the premiere to their Yahoo Calendars, and then reminded them periodically as the premiere date approached with exclusive content from the show.



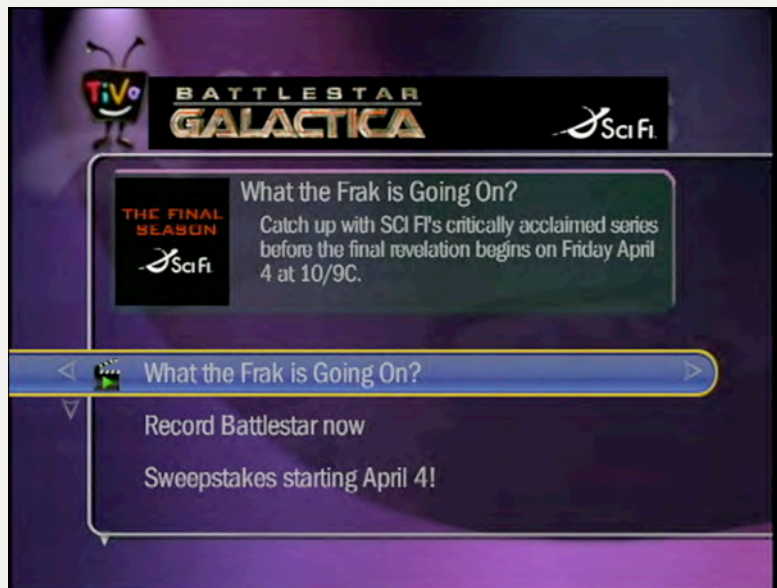
Howard Stern's Countdown-to-Premiere:

Through a paid integration the week leading up to premiere, we had Howard Stern, perhaps the show's most famous fan, spend the whole week counting down to the premiere by speculating on his radio show about potential plotlines that might arise, recalling his favorite moments from the show's past, and posing trivia questions to his audience for cash.



TiVo Tune-In Promotion:

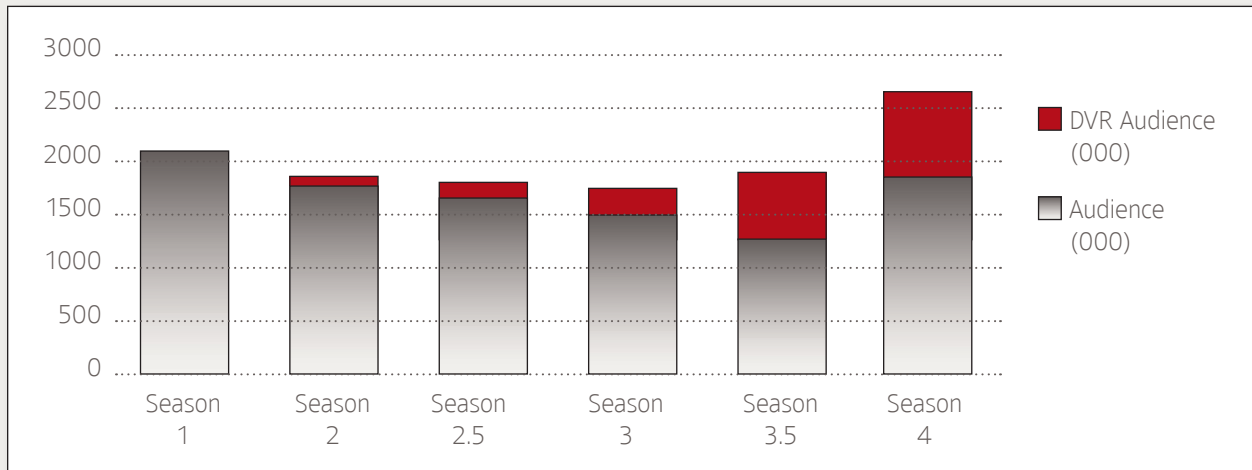
TiVo was the enemy this campaign was trying to defeat, but with this tactic, we decided to embrace it instead. The promotion was designed to motivate TiVo users to watch the show within the Live +3 window. We created ad units on TiVo prompting viewers to record *Battlestar Galactica* in order to get answers to quiz questions, which would then enter them to win an iPhone. The catch: They had just 3 days after the premiere to enter to win.



Results

The Season Four premiere of *Battlestar Galactica* was the most watched episode in the series' history, with record numbers in both Live and Live +3 viewing:

- Live viewing was up 36% over the year prior (1.84M vs. 1.36M)
- +3 viewing alone was up 68% over the year prior (811K vs. 484K)
- Combined, Live +3 viewing was up 44% over the year prior (2.65M vs. 1.84M)



- 85% of DVR viewership was within 3 days or fewer, and thus counted toward Live +3 ratings

So, in the end, with the right communications strategy for the right audience, we learned that it is, in fact, possible to stop worrying and love the DVR.