



CCAUA Backgrounder

Canadian shows are not making it on to “real” prime time

What is real prime time?

The CRTC defines prime time, or the peak viewing period, as 7 pm to 11 pm, Monday through to Sunday. However, advertisers and audiences alike know that “real” prime time is a more narrowly defined portion of the viewing schedule. Real prime time is when the most viewers are watching – from 8pm to 10pm, Sunday through Thursday. This means that Friday and Saturday evenings, and the 7 pm slot, are considered the ‘shoulder’ periods of prime time because fewer viewers tune in at these times.

When does the CRTC require networks to air Canadian shows?

The CRTC’s 1999 Television Policy requires that private broadcasters air eight hours of Canadian priority programming in the 7 to 11 pm time slot each week. The policy loosened the definition of ‘priority programming’ to include re-runs or previously-aired Canadian programs, and low-budget magazines-style programming. The 1999 policy also allows priority programming to be spread throughout the week and throughout the broadcast year so private broadcasters can relegate Canadian programs to timeslots and seasons that do not interfere with peak advertising earning times.

How does this affect Canadian programs?

Canadian conventional broadcasters’ schedules are dominated by U.S. networks’ programming priorities – a practice condoned by the current CRTC rules. This means that Canadian programs are scheduled in and around top-rated U.S. shows and moved around the schedule to accommodate non-Canadian fare. A recent example is *Robson Arms*, a long-awaited half-hour drama set in Vancouver that CTV finally fit into its schedule – on Friday evenings at 10:30 pm, starting in late June and running throughout the summer. Although this timeslot falls within the CRTC’s peak period, allowing CTV to count the show as a priority program, it is also a time when few Canadians turn on their televisions.

How does U.S. simulcasting impact Canadian drama?

Robson Arms joins other English Canadian dramas, like the *Eleventh Hour* and *Blue Murder*, that have been relegated to slots where they can be counted as priority shows for CRTC purposes, but where they are least likely to interfere with the scheduling of foreign fare purchased off-the-shelf from Hollywood. Simulcast privileges are the backbone of Canadian private broadcasting because they permit Canadian networks to purchase the right to air U.S. programs at the same time as they are aired south of the border, while substituting U.S. advertising with Canadian ads. Since all advertising revenue generated by the acquired show in Canada flows to the Canadian broadcaster, this right has proven very profitable for Canadian broadcasters.

For more details, see the CCAU Report *The Need for a Regulatory Safety Net*, June 13, 2005