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This Week's News

Fox: NASCAR ad sales gaining speed

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An improved television ad sales marketplace is breathing new life into Fox's NASCAR sales this season, as the network has sold 80 percent of the inventory for the Daytona 500 and is expecting a full sellout before the race.

Ad sales for the rest of the network's 13-race schedule are pacing 8 to 10 percent ahead of last year's levels.

Fox's NASCAR sales push is being helped by a more active marketplace, which is seeing advertising sales slowly rebound across virtually all sports. These early returns represent a big relief for the sport and the network considering that last year's TV ratings were the lowest in a decade.

"We're definitely going to be in a much better situation than we were last year," said Neil Mulcahy, Fox Sports' executive vice president of advertising sales.

Emblematic of the rebounding economy is the automotive category, which Fox said is tripling its revenue commitment from last year. Fox expects to double the amount of auto sponsors that buy into the regular season. Last year, just two autos — Toyota and Ford — bought regular-season schedules. Both are back this year, as is General Motors.

Plus, Fox said GoDaddy, Nationwide and Cialis also have stepped up as new advertisers with significant buys. GoDaddy is in the first year of a primary sponsorship on Mark Martin's No. 5 car, while also sponsoring Danica Patrick's entry in the Nationwide Series. Nationwide, the title sponsor of NASCAR's No. 2 series, has an extensive ad campaign under way with Dale Earnhardt Jr. and his sister Kelley.

Unlike other sports, NASCAR team sponsors are not required to purchase a network schedule.

News that Fox's NASCAR season is doing well does not surprise Tom McGovern, managing director for Optimum Sports. McGovern, who places buys for NASCAR sponsors like McDonald's, FedEx and the Amp Energy brand, said he mainly is attracted to NASCAR's ratings, which consistently are among the highest-rated events in the first quarter of the year, even if the ratings have dropped recently. "Its ratings are down. But it's reliable," he said. "Sports ratings fluctuate from year to year."

Fox said advertisers also have been responding to on-track changes designed to make the racing more exciting this season (see [related story](#)).



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As part of its sales pitch, Fox is trying to persuade advertisers to commit to more on-screen sponsorships.

Fox is basing much of its sales pitch this year on convincing advertisers to commit to more on-screen enhancements beyond 30-second spots.

In its sales presentations, Fox uses research from Image Impact, which provides audience measurement data that assigns a value to sponsor mentions on a specific broadcast.

The data documents that brands that commit to more on-screen sponsorships — from in-car cameras to leaderboards — will have their brand highlighted more frequently during the race telecast and will derive more value from their buy.

"Leveraging your investment on the car and on the track makes sense to bring on to the broadcast platform," said Rick Kloiber, vice president of sales for Fox Sports. "People are going to choose not to do it. People are going to choose to do it. People that choose to do it, we like to make sure that they

are rewarded handsomely for it.”

Last season, brands like Bud, Aflac and Home Depot bought these sponsorships; and brands like M&M's, DuPont and Target did not.

According to the Image Impact data, which was provided by Fox, a sample of nine NASCAR team sponsors that also bought on-screen enhancements (not including commercial spots) saw its branding value increase by 301 percent to a total of \$17.4 million over Fox's 13 races through on-screen exposure.

The in-broadcast branding especially helped NAPA last season.

The auto parts chain sponsored Michael Waltrip's car, which had a poor season, finishing a distant 33rd in the point standings. But because of NAPA's separate sponsorship deal with Fox, it still received significant air time, creating an overall value of \$16 million for the sponsorship, according to the Image Impact data.

If NAPA had not added to its car sponsorship with a media buy, its value last season would have been just \$2.79 million and it would have received little air time since it was not near the lead.

“We control ‘the more you give, the more you get’ theory,” said Steve McKiernan, senior vice president of sales for Fox Sports. “We control the amount of exposure they're getting — whether it's running orders or desk signage or promotional messaging.”

The early ad sales bump is not limited to the television side. FoxSports.com is seeing a 30 percent revenue jump over last year. Dove (Unilever) and Chevy have stepped up to sponsor the online photo gallery and the site's GameCast-style application RaceTrax, respectively. Neither company advertised with the site last year. Sprint, the title sponsor of NASCAR's top series, also has made a significant online buy.

Staff writer Michael Smith contributed to this report.