MINNEAPOLIS (AdAge.com) -- Still evolving from a business model born in the "Mad Men" era of three networks and three martini lunches, network TV's summertime prime-time schedule of repeats and reality is the scheduling equivalent to rolling out the red carpet to cable competitors (or cousins, in today's cross-ownership world). Monday night, for instance, featured second showings for three networks (CBS, Fox and the CW), all reality on ABC, and a reality/news grid on NBC. No network ran an original episode of a scripted series. Comparatively, cable seized the pop-culture news narrative, with Showtime's season premiere of "Weeds" and series premiere of "Nurse Jackie" joined by TNT's opening of "The Closer" and "Raising the Bar."

The ubiquitous billboards for "Nurse Jackie," as well as extensive free media as critics compared star Edie Falco to her previous turn as mafia mom Carmela Soprano on the HBO hit, gave Showtime the type of hype usually reserved for a new network TV show. It also dealt "Weeds" more media attention, as Showtime continued its resurgence as a feisty competitor to HBO in the post-"Sopranos" and post-"Sex and the City" era.
Ratings aren't available yet due to Showtime's status as a pay-cable network. They are in for basic cable's TNT, however, and offer an example of how counterprogramming can compete (albeit not beat) with the networks as they slide into their summertime pattern.

The return of both TNT dramas saw viewers return as well. "The Closer" delivered a 1.7/5 rating and share in the ad-centric adult 18-49 demographic, while lead-out "Raising the Bar," which was a bit lower at a 0.9/2, were at or above last summer's season averages.

"The Closer" was close to a repeat of Fox's hit "House" (1.9/6) and above a rerun of "Bones" (1.6/4). It was also well above reruns of scripted series "Gossip Girl" (0.4/1) and "One Tree Hill" (0.3/1) on the CW. But it could not beat "The Bachelorette" (2.5/7) and "Here Come the Newlyweds" (1.9/5) on ABC, or CBS's sitcom repeats. (Please see the chart below for all network ratings.)

But cable is winning, at least in advancing its longtime goal of blurring the broadcast/cable perception differential. And it's not just in ratings, but ravings, as critical acclaim for several scripted series will probably lead to many cable shows being nominated for Emmys, in balloting that began last Friday (nods will be announced July 16).

With some careful cutting, edited versions of these shows -- as well as big breakthroughs like FX's "Damages" and AMC's "Mad Men," which were the first two basic cable series to be nominated for Best Drama -- could just as easily run on network TV.

But some summertime scripted series should be tried on a continual basis, as opposed to this week's short list of original episodes, which are often more reflective of commercial considerations (ABC burning off episodes of "The Unusuals") than actual attempts at launching a new series (Fox's "Mental" and NBC's "The Listener").

To be sure, many shows on network TV supersede the series on cable, as Emmy voters and TV viewers indicate. And cable has its share of schlock, too, including last night's top two rated cable shows with adult 18-49 year-olds, USA's "WWE" (2.2/6) and the night's other big wrestling match, the marriage of Jon and Kate Gosselin on TLC's "Jon and Kate Plus 8" (1.9/5). And network lacks the dual revenue stream of cable that makes lower ratings still profitable.

But if the networks are able to still win with bachelorettes, newlyweds (including Heidi and Spencer Pratt, whose antics on NBC's "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!" have moved the show from the ridiculous to a post-modern sublime), imagine what they could do during the summer with smart series like those that premiered on cable Monday night.

**WHAT TO WATCH:**

**Tuesday:** After last night's cable debuts, it's back to broadcast for the best drama on TV. No, not a repeat of CBS's police procedurals, but do-or-die Game 6 of The Stanley Cup Finals on NBC and an almost do-or-die, at least for the Orlando Magic, who are down 2-0 to the Lakers, of the NBA Finals.

**Wednesday:** Quick: Say PBS and music, and what comes to mind? The Boston Pops on July 4th? Peter, Paul and Mary during pledge week? For many, that's the case. Which is why it's so refreshing to see "American Masters" profile a pop artist in "Neil Young: Don't Be Denied."
WHAT TO WATCH FOR:
Wins by the Red Wings over the Penguins, the Magic over the Lakers and ABC's NBA over NBC's NHL.

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NOTE: All ratings based on adults 18-49. A share is a percentage of adults 18-49 who have their TV sets on at a given time. A rating is a percentage of all adults 18-49, whether or not their sets are turned on. For example, a 1.0 rating is 1% of the total U.S. adults 18-49 population with TVs. Ratings quoted in this column are based on live-plus-same-day unless otherwise noted. (Many ad deals have been negotiated on the basis of commercial-minute, live-plus-three-days viewing.)

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