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ESPN's favorite viewers are teens

By T.J. O'CONNOR
The Tattoo

ESPN and teenagers have a lot in common - fun, technology, change, and most importantly, sports.

But as much as teens might think they need ESPN, the sports media giant needs them even more.

"Teens are the biggest fans, absolutely," said Artie Bulgrin, a senior vice-president and ratings analyst at ESPN. "We skew to a younger audience."

SportsCenter anchor Rich Eisen said ESPN's style - not taking sports too seriously and using comedy to attract viewers - appeals to young people.

ESPN lures teen viewers with star athletes, the popular, self-promoting "This is SportsCenter" ad campaign, cutting edge technology and even the new, "futuristic" SportsCenter set.

Executive Editor John Walsh said the network uses many tactics to capture teenage viewers.

"It's an important demographic," said Walsh.

ESPN airs exciting and interesting plays over and over, added Walsh, which he said is something teens like.

"We try to inject as much humor as possible," said Walsh, and uses plenty of cultural references. He said ESPN also tries to feature players or stars who are popular among teens.

ESPN knows that much of its success lies in the hands of its teenage audience, and is constantly trying to increase its teenage audience.

Mark Shapiro, ESPN executive vice-president, said the company is doing "significantly better" in the 12 to 24-year-old demographic, attributing the improvement to airing more Little League games, the rise of extreme sports and the X Games.

Most viewers watching the X Games are in the 12 to 24-year-old group, Shapiro said, adding that it is the toughest group to attract and "the most important and the most valuable" to advertisers.

Teenagers can depend on ESPN to provide all the information they need about sporting events that they didn't have time to watch, Bulgrin said, and news on upcoming events as well.

According to Bulgrin, social currency matters most to young people.

"Sports and music, they go hand in hand," said Bulgrin.

ESPN The Magazine took this into account in terms of clothing, the style of graphics used and subject matter, according to John Skipper, an executive vice-president at ESPN who is in charge of ESPN.com and the magazine.

In launching ESPN The Magazine, the company aimed at younger readers, Skipper said, avoiding the audience already locked up by Sports Illustrated.

Skipper credited the success of the popular magazine to having a younger staff. The magazine takes a look inside the sports, he said, rather than dwelling on a game that is already history.

"Kids care about that more," said Skipper. First-person features by athletes are popular with teenage readers, Skipper said, because younger readers are skeptical about the press and like to see articles entirely in the words of the subject rather than filtered by a writer.

Bulgrin cited an ESPN poll showing that teenagers are the biggest sports fans.

Of those questioned, 46 percent consider themselves "Serious-to-Super Fans," according to Bulgrin, compared to 30 percent for the general population.

According to the latest research conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited, an organization that specializes in research on teens, more male ages 12 to 19 ranked ESPN or ESPN2 as their favorite than any other television network.

"It's the fun that we have and kids like to have, in one

cool, slick package," said Eisen. Skipper said the ESPN.com website is changed constantly, sometimes several times during the course of an important game.

While adults might find flashing icons and moving messages on their computer screen annoying, Skipper said, teenagers find them a cool, quick and convenient source of information.

According to Eisen, teenage boys have two passions: girls and sports.

"When I was a teenager, that's all I cared about," Eisen said.

Viewers 12-to-24 years old are the toughest to attract and "the most important and the most valuable" to advertisers, said ESPN marketing executive Mark Shapiro.

A firsthand look inside ESPN

By T.J. O'CONNOR
The Tattoo

After years of watching ESPN every day from the confines of my living room, I got the chance recently to go behind the scenes and see what really goes on in there.

From the outside, the ESPN complex looked like a high security government building.

Not just anyone can enter the premises. Security guards check your ID at the gate. As a reporter, I was allowed inside and had access to areas normally closed to the public.

All of the buildings are locked up and there are guards behind every door. It's pretty extreme for a sports broadcasting organization.

Inside the buildings are rooms and rooms of old footage that aired on ESPN, from the first SportsCenter show ever aired in 1979 to last week's college football games.

I walked through hallways that served as branches to little rooms that looked like cockpits, with tons of monitors, hundreds of buttons and controller sticks.

As I headed towards the office rooms where most of the ESPN talent write their columns and prepare to go on air I passed Bob Ley, the host of "Outside The Lines."

(He's actually a lot taller than he appears to be on television.)

In the office room NFL2Night's Mark Malone was preparing for that night's show. I also saw SportsCenter anchors Chris McKendry talking on the phone and Trey Wingo working on his computer. It was neat to see so many people at the same time up close that I see almost every day on TV.

On the "21st century" SportsCenter set, I spoke one-on-one with SportsCenter stars Rich Eisen and Stuart Scott. Eisen was funnier in person than on television and Scott was as passionate in his opinions as he is when he is doing the show. I was talking to Scott about how overblown the incident in the Little League World Series was, when the player from the Bronx waved goodbye to a homerun he hit as he rounded the bases. Eisen gave me his opinions on the Pacific 10 conference and told me how he started his career as a sports reporter.

When I walked into the SportsCenter set I was amazed at how large it was because on TV you only see a small portion of it. I got a chance to try out the anchor's chair behind the desk, too.

I went into the production rooms where they prepare for the shows hours before they air. The producers want to get everything perfect for SportsCenter. When I was in there



Photo courtesy of ESPN

T.J. O'Connor behind the desk on the SportsCenter set

they were working on the entrance of the Sport Center logo at the beginning of the show.

That wasn't the end of my time spent at this humungous sports world.

I was lucky enough to have dinner with College Gameday's Lee Corso, Kirk Herbstreit and Chris Fowler.

This was the best part of my time at ESPN because for me, Gameday and Corso are my favorites.

Corso told me stories of how his car was struck by lightning while he was doing commentary for a Virginia Tech game.

As I sat at dinner talking college football with the man who had all the answers to my questions regarding the sport, I thought about my experience at ESPN and realized how far-reaching this place is.

Not just company's sprawling Bristol campus, but the sheer number of people who watch the network and the sports fans who depend on ESPN to provide them with the information they crave.

My two days inside ESPN gave me a much greater appreciation for the work that goes on inside "The Worldwide Leader in Sports."

Notebook

I spoke one-on-one with SportsCenter stars Rich Eisen and Stuart Scott.

A coffee junkie confesses

By LYNN RENEE RICHTER
The Tattoo

Okay, I admit I have been sucked in by Starbucks' marketing ploy that it is, in fact, the sole provider of coffee to a caffeine-starved populace.

What, you can actually get coffee elsewhere? No way! (Cha-ching! Rake in the dough for Starbucks!)

They have a word to describe people like me: coffee-addict. Some people wonder if my coffee cup is super-glued to my hand or if it actually comes loose.

As a senior, I have discovered there are two main uses for Starbucks.

One is to fuel the ever-popular all-nighter so I can frantically write my next term paper.

The combination of senioritis and an insanely busy schedule provide excellent conditions for the appearance of an espresso-fueled all-nighter.

Score one for Starbucks. The next and most important reason for Starbucks is hanging out with fellow Starbucks addicts.

In a life filled with school-work, classes, working 20 hours a week and reminding my family that I do still exist, friendships can be hard to maintain.

So one of my best friends and I created our Starbucks run. Basically, it is two hours (almost) every Saturday to sit and talk while surrounded by the quiet hum of espresso machines.

That is why, for those of us in our last year of high school, Starbucks exists.

If you are not a senior, introduce yourself to Starbucks now.

After all, if you're going to be

spending your entire senior year together, don't you want to be good friends already?

I think I hear Starbucks calling my name now.

One of the benefits of being a senior at my school is - drum roll, please - off-campus lunch. Starbucks, anyone?

Or perhaps the fine culinary treats of Fazolis or Applebees?

We have the power to choose! Finally, we can eat without the teachers watching us like we were first-graders.

Finally, we don't have to eat the same thing week in and week out.

But there's one more benefit to off-campus lunches.

It is the one we've been anxiously awaiting: waving our non-cafeteria food in front of the underclassmen.

Mmmmm! Aren't my Burger King onion rings tasty?

Isn't this Juice Stop smoothie wonderful?

How are your slices of cafeteria pizza, again and again and again?

We are not completely horrible, though.

Occasionally, moved with compassion by the sight of some poor underclassmen eating Chick-Fil-A for the 106th time, we break down and bring them food from the outside world.

After all, we remember what it was like being a poor sophomore or junior.

You can only eat a Subway cold-cut sandwich so many times.

Senior Journal 2002-03

Katie Jordan / The Tattoo

Follow our seniors as they write about their journey through the final year of high school in an occasional series here and on the web.

THE DAILY SKETCHES by Joe Keo
010102/082302

Joe Keo / The Tattoo

Freshmen, don't suffer

If you need help coping with the rigors of high school life, check out *The Tattoo's* Insider's Guide to High School. It's all at www.ReadTheTattoo.com, along with much more on teen suicide, school violence, teen pregnancy, teen travel and movie, music and book reviews, senior journals and lots of Daily Sketches.