

Media, advertisers ready for audience surge

October 30 2012, by Ryan Nakashima

Sometimes it's not the size of the storm, it's where it hits. As Hurricane Sandy raged through one of the country's most densely populated regions, it created a surge in online traffic Monday as people sought weather-related news and various forms of online entertainment.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of the brisk online traffic was The [Weather Channel](#), which began streaming its television feed live on [YouTube](#) and on its own website late Sunday night. On Monday, the channel expected to serve up its highest number of page views in a single day since a [blizzard](#) blanketed the northeastern U.S. and Canada with snow on Feb. 1 2011.

"It's like our mini Super Bowl," said Curt Hecht, the chief global revenue officer for channel owner The Weather Co. "As a company, everybody really pulls together. There are three or four or five days when nobody's sleeping, when we need to be at our best."

Free online access to the live feed of The Weather Channel is unusual but not unheard of. The channel is usually restricted to the televisions of [pay TV](#) subscribers, but exceptions are made in disaster situations. It is the first time the channel has partnered with YouTube on a live feed.

With an increase in audience comes a surge in [advertising revenue](#). Regular [TV commercials](#) were not played in the online Weather Channel stream, but insurer State Farm sponsored a banner ad that ran along the bottom of the screen over a weather map shown during commercial breaks.

Companies like insurer The Travelers Companies Inc. and The Procter & Gamble Co.'s Duracell are sponsoring the Weather Channel service that lets people know which of their Facebook friends lie in the storm's path.

With ads already running on The Weather Channel, Duracell is planning to send out trucks to give away free batteries in the storm's aftermath. They will also let people charge their cellphones and mobile devices for free.

"The panic starts when people don't prepare," said Duracell's associate director of global communications, Win Sakdinan. He recommended that people in the storm's path stock up now or wait until it's calmer and stores are open for batteries needed for flashlights and radios.

Other companies like home improvement retailers and generator makers bought bulk airtime on The Weather Channel months ago in preparation for major weather events. Advertisers that have nothing to do with severe weather were also looking to buy commercial spots as people begin to turn away from regular programming to pay attention to storm-related news.

Online access to news sites began spiking over the weekend. The Weather Channel's Weather.com had 105.4 million page views on Sunday, its fifth biggest day ever, and was on track to beat the 140.9 million page views from Feb. 1, 2011, on Monday.

CNN.com had 55.3 million page views as of 2 p.m. Eastern time, up 132 percent from the previous four Mondays.

Newspapers such as The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Baltimore Sun lifted restrictions on their websites Monday so they were available to people who don't pay for access.

"It's a public service, we're concerned about disseminating critical information," said Times spokeswoman Eileen Murphy.

The Journal's WSJ.com website, which already offered free access to stories about Hurricane Sandy, lifted all barriers to online access at midnight Eastern time on Sunday.

Some people simply wanted an escape from the news on Monday. Netflix Inc. said video streaming was up 20 percent compared with last Monday. A lot of the activity came from the New York, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore areas. And, of course, many children's titles were popular, "a sign that kids are staying home from school," said Netflix spokesman Joris Evers.

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