

CBS hopes debate coverage will boost streaming service

November 13 2015, by David Bauder

CBS News sees its coverage of Saturday's Democratic presidential debate as a key moment in helping to establish CBSN, the streaming service that just celebrated its first birthday.

Political reporter Major Garrett will host a preview of the debate an hour before it begins on CBSN. The free service will stream the debate live, accompanied by data and tweets provided by Twitter, with Garrett stepping in with reactions during [commercial breaks](#) of the televised contest. It is also being shown on the broadcast television network.

CBSN, which launched on Nov. 6, 2014, provides a continuous newscast and also allows users to click on streams of individual stories. It is available on the CBS News website, on the network's mobile apps and through services like Apple TV, Roku and Android TV. Starting this week, it can also be seen on Xbox One.

"What this has to be to be a success is to be completely ubiquitous, that everybody who is delivering live news content has to be distributing us," said CBS News President David Rhodes.

CBS views it as the future of video news, a generation removed from cable news networks. The average age of a CBSN viewer is just under 40, considerably younger than the traditional television news demographic, the Nielsen company said. It is younger by three years for people watching on Internet-connected televisions.

For now, the service is unique to CBS. Rhodes said he believes competitors like CNN, Fox News and MSNBC are reluctant to try something similar because potential users would be put off by having to go through cable companies to use the service.

"If we make a go of this and it becomes a commercial success, I think you will see others try to get into it," he said. "I think we would welcome that because it's a validation of our strategy."

While the network does not say how many people use CBSN, Rhodes said he expected it will get more views Saturday night than ever before.

Usage tends to spike around major news events, he said. Oddly, the service has done well before, during and after previous presidential debates, which Rhodes found surprising considering CBSN did not stream them. The service has offered ongoing discussions about the debates while they were happening with occasional highlights, and Rhodes speculated it appeals to cord-cutters who have no traditional TV service.

This Saturday, network executives anticipate CBSN will be used as a second screen for many people already watching the debate on the broadcast network.

Garrett said he'll be helping to curate the Twitter feed that will appear on the CBSN screen. "That's part of the experiment," he said. "Everyone associated with [social media](#) is trying to figure out—how do you make it meaningful and not just noisy?"

Because of social media, the "spin room" that existed after debates is now in operation while the event is still going on. Garrett will use the broadcast commercial breaks to show how campaign aides are trying to shape the stories.

Garrett, who worked at both CNN and Fox News Channel, had anticipated a more structured environment at CBS with newscasts in the morning and evening broadcasts. CBSN takes him back to his cable days where there is much more time to fill; fewer commercials mean discussions can go even longer at CBSN.

His children—ages 20, 19 and 15—provide him with a daily reminder of the importance of CBSN. Their dad works in TV but they rarely see him there. They catch him in clips that are linked on social media.

"The digital platform is essential for the fate of broadcast network [news](#)," he said. "We have to be in that space."

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