

The unmaking of Jay Leno/UPDATED

You may remember that back last spring a big announcement was made that Leno would be in prime time, every day at 10:00 p.m, and Conan O'Brien would have the Tonight Show. The idea seemed to be that Leno is pretty popular, and a variety show is cheaper to produce than say a quality show like Law & Order, so why not have Leno take up this real estate which had so long been the province of the good TV dramas.

Well, the programming folks over at NBC are now discussing moving Jay Leno back to his original 11:35 p.m. spot, after the news.

Anyone could have told NBC that this would fail. In fact a TV station in Boston was going to refuse to run Leno, because they thought it would hurt their lead for the late night news. It did. They were right. NBC strong-armed their stations into accepting the Leno show by saying they would be dropped if they did not go along.

What this shows, in my opinion, is the isolated world that TV programming folks live in. It shows hubris. It shows lack of research and a lack of common sense. I think most people questioned whether Leno could succeed at the earlier hour. Especially, up against what ABC and CBS offer at that hour. Leno is about about late night humor. He is not Barbara Walters, up to interviewing all sorts of folks.

In the end, the Leno Show was not bringing in the viewers that the 11:00 p.m. news needed (a very profitable franchise). NBC was probably bleeding viewers at the 10:00 pm and 11:35 pm hours too (Conan was no Jay). Bottom line, it was costing money to produce a lower costing show.

What do you think?

UPDATE:

Steven Pearlstein, columnist for the Washington Post hits the nail on the head regarding what NBC did in business terms. Read his column here.