

More "puff" yet in TV viewing

AdNews

17 June 2011

EXCLUSIVE: As pay TV and free-to-air networks slog it out for viewers, data from OzTAM suggests the FTA networks are in for a more fancied uplift than expected in their overall audience numbers.

It all comes down to when people convert their second and third home TV sets to digital. Today, 87.4% of homes can receive digital FTA on their primary home screen, typically stationed in the lounge room.

But those same homes are yet to convert remaining TV sets in the house to digital – 51.8% of those second and third screens are plodding along with analogue-only broadcasts, which means none of the FTA digital channels can be viewed. If the viewing trends carry through from what's occurred in homes with their first TV set, then digital FTA viewing has got some serious growth ahead of it yet.

OzTAM chief executive Doug Peiffer says it's possible. "In January, the free-to-air digital channels were collectively bigger than pay TV. Digital has grown the market but it had to come from somewhere and it has come off the main [FTA] channels."

Peiffer says this year, the digital FTA channels have added about 500,000 viewers to its base but accounting for the 300,000 lost from the primary channels, the net gain is around 200,000 viewers. "There is still a lot of puff in there for free-to-air," he says.

But MCN's chief executive, Anthony Fitzgerald, says pay TV is not spooked. "I still stand by our long-term position on this. The impact FTA digital channels will have on our business is and will remain immaterial."