**How Netflix is Giving Viewers Exactly What They Want**

Released at the beginning of this month, the Netflix original series *House of Cards* is based on a '90s BBC miniseries of the same name. Within two weeks, the series became the number one most-watched program on Netflix. And how did it get there? Well Big Data was a major player. In a prime example of how creativity and Big Data can function together, Netflix's original series served as a great, though expensive, experiment.

**How Netflix Uses Data**

Netflix is poised in a perfect position to deliver a new series, as the content provider knows its users intimately: what shows and movies they like; the correlations between actors and the shows and movies they like; when they pause, replay, or stop watching a program. All subscriber actions are effectively data points for Netflix to extract information. In the case of *House of Cards*, the company deduced that viewers who enjoyed the BBC's *House of Cards* coincided with a cross-section of Kevin Spacey and David Fincher fans. With the budget to pull both of these players in, *House of Cards* was born, designed to give potential fans exactly what they're looking for in the series.

**That's Entertainment**

It's interesting to point out that unlike online competitor Hulu, or network-affiliated streaming such as ABC or the CW, Netflix doesn't sell advertising. The original series, as well as the upcoming release of an *Arrested Development* season were wholly funded by Netflix.

Freed from this traditional model of television programming, new creative concerns emerge: will the analysis of this collected data begin to corrupt the creative process? Will new content become formulaic, with cinematographic technique, actors, and plot served to satisfy audiences based on past preferences?

Based on the initial success of *House of Cards*, and pending future growth of a series fanbase, networks may begin to take note. With all major networks offering their own version of Internet-based streaming, each has their own rich bank of data to examine.

This use of data may explain spinoff shows, such as *The Carrie Diaries*; or cross-promotion across networks and shows using key actors, such as the *Bob's Burgers* reference in this season of *Archer*. We may even see a mashup of *Mean-Girls*-esque high school dramas featuring the leads from *Gossip Girl* and *Pretty Little Liars* as written by Tina Fey. But would that really be so bad?

**What This Means for Consumers**

The *House of Cards* foray presented an interesting model, as all episodes of the series were released simultaneously. Ted Sarandos, Netflix's Chief Content Officer, calls it an evolution for television series, hoping not to break the existing pattern, but to take it forward. He argues that all tracks on an album are released at once, so why not consider the same for TV series? The company is hoping for similar success with the release of *Arrested Development*, and the new season will be released in the same manner.

As an admitted binge-watcher of series, I'm thrilled that Netflix is thinking in season-long chunks rather than single episodes. While this schedule doesn't allow them to capitalize on the weekly buzz

surrounding a new episode premiere, Netflix may be starting a new trend in how video is created, shared, and consumed. While HBO is not a proponent of the mass season release, I hope that content providers will follow Netflix's lead, eventually leading to a sea change in how video content is created and served to the public.

Based on the number of blog articles, newly minted fans of longstanding series, and this hilarious sketch on Portlandia, I'd say consumers have already changed how they are digesting video content. With the immediate access to several older seasons of shows on Netflix and Hulu, viewers can now mainline shows in just a few short weeks, sometimes days.

This presents a conundrum for brands and advertisers, as video-on-demand evolved from the TiVO and DVR days, where one could scrub through commercials, to online streaming, where not all streaming services use advertising roadblocks to access content. We may see a shift back towards product placement and sponsorships of the show itself, to integrate brands into the storyline. Advertisers will have to become more creative with the information at hand, while we see content doing the opposite.

While some might worry that Netflix is "turning viewers into puppets," I'm excited to see what this data-informed future will bring. Shows designed to be exactly what I like? More and better video? I'm on board.