

Media & Marketing



Conor Hamill and Laura Cahill of Rothco, who will represent Ireland in the film category at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity
Picture: Fergal Phillips



Conor Brophy As sports fans tune out, broadcasters struggle to find a winning solution

Sports fans are infuriatingly difficult for broadcasters to reach. They display loyalty to their teams and favourite athletes in the face of poor results, disciplinary issues and even occasional skulluggery.

Yet they can be as fickle as a toddler going through the terrible twos. And just when you think you have them figured out, they switch off.

Viewing figures in Britain for Premier League football on Sky TV fell by 14 per cent for the season just ended, according to statistics produced by the Broadcasters Audience Research Board. Rival BT also attracted fewer fans to its coverage.

The year-on-year decline at BT was just 2 per cent. Fans tuning out in significant numbers is not what either company envisaged when they paid a record sum for the rights to air the games.

Sky will point out that while average TV viewing figures were down, the overall number of people watching football and the total minutes of Premier League football watched on Sky increased last year.

That's based on the figures compiled across multiple devices and includes those watching on Sky Go, its mobile app. As measured by the number of people who watched Premier League matches for at least 15 minutes across all platforms, its viewing figures are at a three-year high.

But, like the action on the pitch, it's a results business and results for the three months to the end of March lagged up a number of issues which will concern Sky.

Subscriber growth has slowed – the company added 40,000 subscribers over that period compared to 70,000 in the same period a year earlier.

That's partly a consequence of significant price rises. The monthly cost of a subscription in Britain, including Sky Sports, rose by billion Sky and BT paid for Premier League TV rights in Britain, 70 per cent higher than the previous deal in 2012.

Hiking the price hasn't been enough to recoup that outlay. Operating profit for the most recent financial quarter was down 11 per cent, which Sky attributes mainly to higher programming costs (of which the football rights are a significant component).

Younger viewers, in particular, are balking at the asking price for monthly TV packages including premium sports. Other content is competing for their time and money. A monthly broadband bill, plus €9.99 for Netflix and perhaps another €9.99 a month for a music service such as Spotify leaves precious little time or money to spend on sport.

That's a global phenomenon. US sports network ESPN has been losing subscribers for several years now. The big tune-out is even affecting the NFL, the sport with the world's most expensive media rights.

CBS, NBC, Fox and ESPN are paying \$3.6 billion to carry American football games between now and 2022. Average viewing figures for the season which ended with Super Bowl LI in February were down by 1.4 million per game to 16.5 million.

The NFL has experimented with new broadcast partners. Twitter had the rights to air Thursday night games last season, a package which was acquired by Amazon for the 2017-18 season.

The cord cutters, those consumers happy to rely on internet-based services and unwilling to pay for cable TV, are a big part of the problem.

They're watching in different ways, increasingly on mobile devices and they appear less willing to sit down and take in an entire match in one sitting. They are harder to reach, harder to recoup subscription fees and advertising revenue from and they have an almost exponentially larger pool of content to choose from than the generation which preceded them.

The figures aren't necessarily correlated with sporting storylines either.

A Premier League season in which Chelsea had the title wrapped up early failed to match the once-in-a-lifetime magic of seeing Leicester defy the odds in 2015-16. That might help explain the decline.

Then again, across the Atlantic, Super Bowl LI in February delivered a dramatic late comeback from the New England Patriots and the first sudden-death overtime game in NFL history but the numbers watching the Super Bowl in the US fell for the second year in a row (though, to be fair, that's coming off a high base as the 2015 game set a record high).

Contrast that with the just-concluded NBA basketball finals. They featured the same pairing – Golden State Warriors vs Cleveland Cavaliers – for the third year running.

The Warriors, a team which was dominant during the association's regular season, won a predictable best of seven series 4-1 and yet it was the most watched NBA finals in almost 20 years.

For sports broadcasters it may simply be a case that you can't win them all.

Young advertising industry LIONS SET TO ROAR

An Irish contingent of over 80 media and marketing professionals is representing Ireland at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, writes Patrick Murtagh

The who's who of the €500 billion advertising industry are currently gathering in France for the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity

Some 19,000 media and marketing professionals will attend the festival, which began yesterday and will run until June 24. Among them will be an Irish contingent of more than 80 people. Within that, a record 14 representatives have been sent by Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland to compete in the Cannes Young Lions competition against teams across the world.

The Sunday Business Post spoke to 26-year-old Conor Hamill and 25-year-old Laura Cahill of Rothco ahead of their trip to Cannes to compete in the film category.

IAPI had challenged the Young Lions entrants to develop campaigns supporting Cystic Fibrosis Ireland's national fundraiser 65 Roses Day on April 13, and it turns out the charity suited the pair very well.

Cahill said Cystic Fibrosis was "close to Rothco's heart because we worked on the Yes Orkambi campaign last year, so we all felt strongly about it. It was like a sign because we all knew so much about cystic fibrosis".

Their film was minimalist and simple, but very powerful. "We knew we'd be making something for the cinema, so we wanted to make use of the sound in cinema and the overall cinema experience," said Hamill.

"So the screen was pretty much black for the most part. We wanted to make it experiential by making the audience empathise with what it's like to fight for breath, because I think people think illnesses happen to other people."

The film displays breath on exit air over a black screen. On-screen prompts guide the viewer through simple breathing exercises, but the breath on screen begins to get shorter and faster.

"The endgame is essentially that you can't keep up with the prompts, so you experience what it's like to live with cystic fibrosis for a few moments," Hamill said.

The Irish Young Lions teams

Conor Hamill and Laura Cahill from Rothco competing in film; Starcom's Sarah Dennehy and Greg Ashe taking part in media; Patricia Prezotto and Tamara Conyngham from Target McConnell's in social media; Emma Wilson and Kyle Schouff, of Richards Dee competing in design; Jennifer Hyland and Emma Williams from Edelman in PR; Rafael Ferla and Laura Halpin of Havas taking part in print; and finally, Vodafone's Patrick Carberry and Rachel Crawley in the young marketers competition.

"It's something that you have to wait for and hope you get a good idea."

Hamill added: "Ideas always come to you, but the best ones, the ones clients want, come sporadically. I think it's something you can learn to an extent, but generally it's something that comes naturally to certain people."

However, they said there's no shortage of good advice and encouragement from senior team members at Rothco, and that support was invaluable in the build-up to the Young Lions competition.

At Cannes, they will have to create a video in 48 hours based on a brief they will receive upon their arrival.

"All we'll have is our laptops and a GoPro, so we have to record sound on our phones and edit it in," said Cahill. Rothco has been training them rigorously on producing films under pressure.

"We've been given some intense training. Alan Kelly, our creative director, assigned us a brief yesterday," Hamill said.

"His practice brief was for the European Commission. Less than 40 per cent of 18 to 25-year-olds are registered to vote, so our aim was to increase that number."

The pair are honored and excited to go and represent Ireland.

"I can't wait. It's so exciting. It's probably the biggest advertising festival in the world, so it's an award everyone wants," said Cahill.

"Cannes is one of those things where every agency in the world knows about it. And to be a part of the best of the best and to breathe the same air as them, it's just a crazy thing to be a part of."

Hamill added: "I think we're going to go crazy with the work and how busy we'll be over there. We're going to need a friendship contract or something. It's going to be intense."

Fast-paced industry

They said the Irish advertising industry is a great one to be involved in as it is fast-paced and ever-changing, suitable for young people.

"It's changed hugely from traditional advertising, which was basically just TV ads, and now it's just content, content, content," said Cahill.

"And there's a lot of new technologies you get to experiment with," Hamill added. "It's different from Mad Men, but we do have a drinks trolley on Fridays!"

They said virtual reality is an area of interest in modern advertising. "I'm interested in seeing how VR takes off. I think it'll become more domesticated than it is now," said Hamill.

Cahill agreed. "I think it's interesting in that it's a one-person experience. It's not like TV where everyone experiences the same thing. It's personal in that way."

Despite being young and full of energy in a fast-paced environment, there are still challenges.

"Not everything goes swimmingly. Every challenge brings a new set of skills that's required and you just learn on every job," said Hamill.

"It's really demanding as well, especially from a creative point of view. It cuts into your personal time. And the more senior you become, the more you have to do that. I think it's harder when you see people in the office with families who have to work late. At least we're young and don't have that much responsibility."

Cahill said that creativity can come at any time. "For me, creativity is really hard. Personally, I wake up in the middle of the night with a great idea," she said.

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