

Disney's upfront presentation deemphasizes scripted content—while leaning into sports

Article

The news: Disney's upfront presentation this week focused heavily on nonscripted programming, featuring nearly an hour of **ESPN** and its sports offerings.

- Disney devoted more than 45 minutes of the two-hour presentation to sports. Notable figures like **Serena Williams** and **Pat McAfee** took the stage, with Williams announcing a docuseries and McAfee confirming his move to ESPN.

Why it matters: The emphasis on live events comes as the writers strike continues and is expected to affect the fall TV season. As with **NBCUniversal's** presentation [the day prior](#), sports and news personalities, as well as reality TV stars, made appearances.

- Despite the absence of any formal mention of the strike, it's clear that the television industry faces "difficult challenges" this year.
- The absence of late-night host **Jimmy Kimmel**, who usually roasts Disney, **ABC**, and the TV landscape during upfronts week, was felt. Kimmel didn't attend the event in solidarity with the writers strike, and while the attending talent tried to fill his shoes, the effect was not the same.

Zoom out: The world of live sports streaming is proving to be both a vital and complex component for streaming platforms.

- Fans of major sports leagues like the **NFL** or **MLB** are finding themselves needing multiple subscriptions to follow all their team's games online due to the fragmented nature of sports streaming.
- That fragmentation is also bad for advertisers, who don't want to spend their heavily scrutinized budgets targeting the same viewer repeatedly with the same ad.

Scripted rears its head: Despite the heavy sports content, scripted series from **Marvel** and **Star Wars** still had their moment.

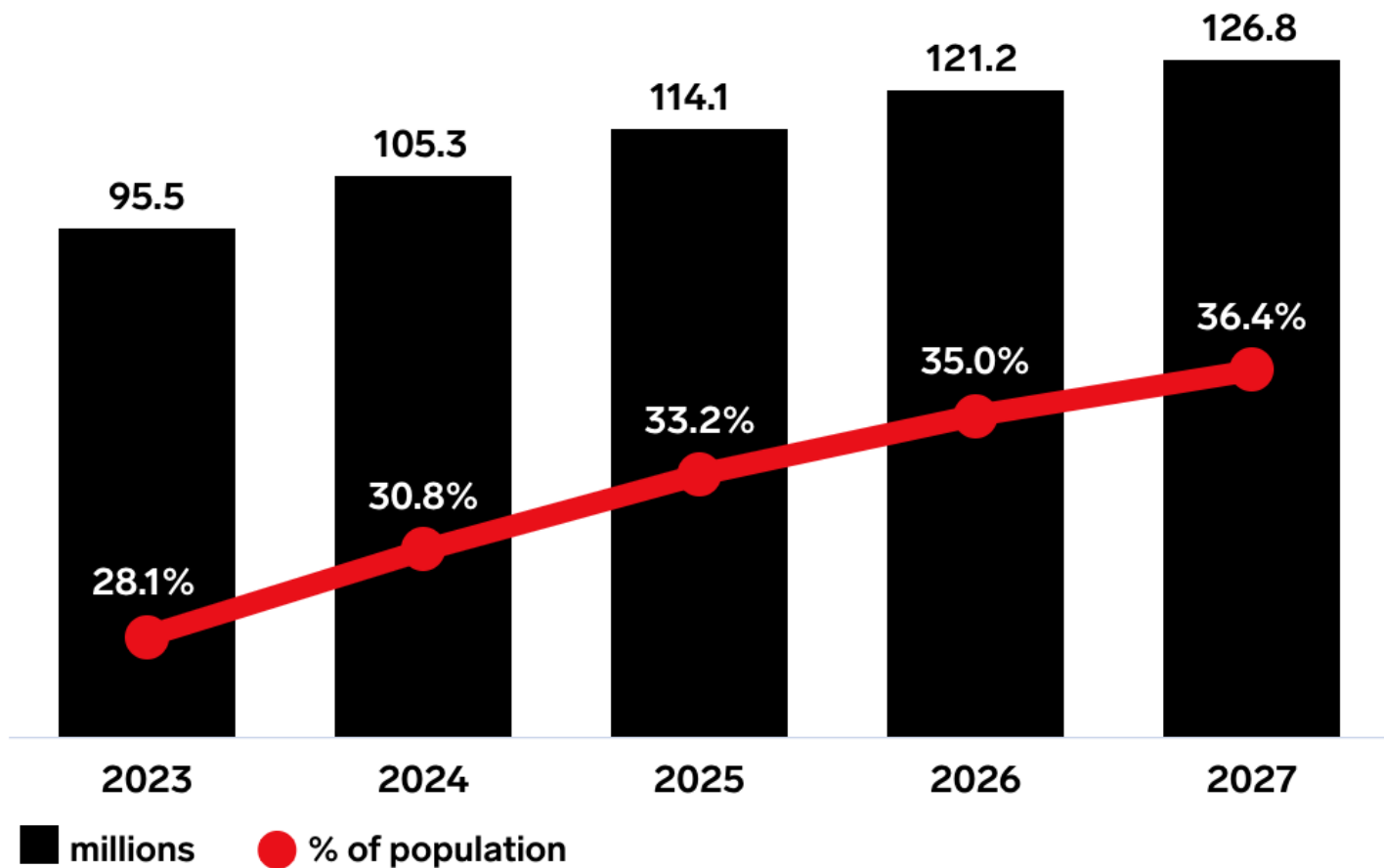
- Marvel boss **Kevin Feige** and Lucasfilm head **Kathleen Kennedy** both offered first looks at upcoming **Disney+** shows, including "Secret Invasion," "The Acolyte," and "Skeleton Crew," along with a featurette for "Ahsoka" starring **Rosario Dawson**.

Our take: The Disney upfront presentation highlighted an important shift in strategy, from scripted to nonscripted content, amid the writers strike.

- While the focus on live sports drew mixed reactions, the introduction of new series from Marvel and Star Wars, as well as Serena Williams' docuseries, underscored Disney's commitment to delivering diverse and compelling content.
- McAfee's transition to ESPN further underlines Disney's push for more sports-oriented content, which builds on returning CEO **Bob Iger**'s February move to turn ESPN into one of the company's three operating units, alongside Disney Parks and Disney Entertainment.
- ESPN+ continues to grow at a healthy clip (+27.1% year over year).
- Despite a challenging and evolving TV landscape, Disney remains better positioned to weather things than some of its competitors.

Digital Live Sports Viewers

US, 2023-2027



Note: individuals of any age who watch live sports content at least once per month over the course of the season of at least one sport on digital platforms such as OTT, TV Everywhere and vMVPDs; excludes highlight viewing and viewing of nonlive content; excludes esports; excludes Olympics content

Source: eMarketer, March 2023

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