

I Want To Talk A Little Bit About Catering To Different Groups Of Fans

One of the biggest complaints you'll see today is that wrestling is booked for kids or that so many fans think the product is stupid. How many times have you heard someone complain about John Cena targeting almost exclusively to children with his promos (ignoring that this isn't correct)? I've tried to explain this over and over again, but if a short version doesn't work, why not write a lot more about it? Today we're going to look at how wrestling is marketed to certain audiences and why it's a bad idea to cater to certain fans. Let's get to it.

We start in a book instead of the 80s this time. There's a very interesting (and highly recommended) book called *Those Guys Have All The Fun* which chronicles the history of ESPN. Back in the early days, ESPN was known for airing almost all college basketball. As in it was aired for over three quarters of the day at times. It was becoming more and more popular, so an executive suggested that ESPN aired nothing but basketball 24/7, but a fellow executive said no way. While it was fine to have a lot of basketball, it would be a much better idea to include stuff like skiing, tennis, running etc.

Now why did the other executive suggest this? His answer was very simple (paraphrased): "If we have 19 hours of basketball instead of 24, we're not going to lose many basketball fans. But, if we have 24 hours of basketball instead of 5 hours of other stuff, we lose the skiing, tennis and running fans." As is the case with almost anything else in life, this can be tied into the world of wrestling.

I've seen every single episode of Monday Night Raw ever. Whether it was watching live or taping it, I've never missed an episode in the twenty plus year history of Raw. In short, I'm a lifer. There is nothing I can imagine WWE doing that is going to make me stop watching the show and they have my full loyalty. I'm sure there are a lot of other fans who are in the same group that I am: loyal fans who are going to watch no matter what is presented.

That last line sums up the entire point of what I'm talking about: a large amount of fans are going to watch wrestling no matter what's presented on the show. Fans that are intense in their devotion to the product, as in intense enough to go on the internet and check out sites like this one and read other peoples' opinions on wrestling, aren't going anywhere anytime soon. Therefore, why in the world should WWE waste their time catering to them?

The obsessive fans, often called the IWC, stereotypically love people like CM Punk and Daniel Bryan while thinking guys like Orton and Cena are shoved down our throats. However, when guys like Cena and Orton are on top and guys like Punk and Bryan are clearly steps below those bigger names, the same fans keep coming back over and over again and can snap off histories and results like no one else can. In other words, they claim to hate the show yet they never miss an episode.

That's why WWE doesn't cater to the internet fans and why they shouldn't: those people are going to watch almost every week and it would be a waste of potential revenue to appeal to such people. We may want to see Daniel Bryan vs. CM Punk for the world title at Wrestlemania, but the masses have little interest in seeing such a thing. While the fans that know Bryan and Punk know what they're capable of, a lot of fans see them as just two small guys who don't look all that interesting. How likely would you be to spend \$50-\$60 to see two guys who might be interesting fight?

Here's the thing that the more obsessive fans can't accept for whatever reason: most people that watch wrestling don't care to see wrestling. Yeah it's a part of the show, but much more of it is about the entertainment aspect. Companies like Ring of Honor talk about being all about the action and jazz like that, but look where Ring of Honor is: on a few television stations in less than major cities with a good PPV meaning the feed only cuts out a few times per match. Most fans likely have no idea what ROH is other than hearing it on a Punk DVD and there's a reason for it: the masses do not care about all wrestling all the time.

If you want a more historical example, look back at the two most successful eras in modern wrestling history: the Golden Age and the Attitude Era. The Golden Age of the 1980s was all about the over the top and colorful antics of guys like Hulk Hogan. Hulk was never what would be considered a ring general, but he had a formula that worked out as well as anything else ever has. Look at Wrestlemania III. There's a match with incredible action that changed the way wrestling worked, and on the other hand we have the biggest match ever. Which do you think drew more people to the show?

There's also the Attitude Era, where wrestling was a rare luxury. I can't count how many times I've watched a Raw from 1999 where a match ran about two minutes before someone came in for a DQ to set up more story elements. Again though, look at how much money the Attitude Era produced by comparison to times like the mid-90s or the Ruthless Aggression Era when wrestling was the focal point of the show. It's two different worlds and the story driven shows, as in the shows booked for the masses instead of the loyal fans, are far more successful.

Let's move on now to a more modern idea which continues to make me shake my head: the John Cena issue. One of the most common complaints you hear

about Cena is that he's booked for children and makes really stupid jokes. This is very true and I don't argue any point of it. I also don't argue that it's the smartest thing the WWE can do for a variety of reasons.

First and foremost, there's the obvious one: merchandising. John Cena appeals to children and every few months he has a new t-shirt out and it's only \$24.99 to make your kid smile because he gets to look like his hero. The NWO did it, Austin did it, Rock did it, but now Cena doing it is stupid because the shirt is red or blue?

Side note about the shirts: look at the lessons/morals the shirts are teaching kids. Austin: "Screw authority and beat up people who disagree with you." Rock: "Be as big of a jerk as you can and insult anyone you don't like." Hogan: "Exercise, pray and believe in yourself." Cena: "Work hard, be loyal and respect people." Why do people complain about Hogan and Cena's catchphrases? Austin, Rock and the NWO basically tell people to cause as much trouble as possible while Cena and Hogan say be good and work hard to get what you want. Those are bad things to teach kids?

Second, yeah Cena caters to kids and the jokes he makes are usually really corny. I hear all of his promos and I don't get why people complain about them so much. At the end of the day, they're not made for me and I'd be ridiculous to expect everything was trying to appeal to my demographic. Cena is there for kids (other than that whole year long feud with Rock where the promos were mostly for adults, as was the entire feud. The same was true with Lesnar. Cena only caters to kids though and there's an army of fans who will tell you so) and guys like Punk, Heyman, Orton, the Wyatts, Shield and Bryan are there for older fans.

Finally, yeah Cena does a lot of the same stuff over and over again. This

would be totally different than:

Right hands, middle finger, Thesz Press, Stunner

Samoan drop, spinebuster, Rock Bottom, People's Elbow

Big boot, chokeslam, Last Ride, Tombston

Knee crusher, knee drop, cannonball down onto the leg, Figure Four

Atomic drop, backbreaker, middle rope elbow, Russian legsweep, Sharpshooter

Hulk Up, right hands, big boot, legdrop

And I could go on and on. EVERYONE has sequences they use and Cena is no different than anyone else. He uses the Five Knuckle Shuffle, but for some reason that's stupid where as a 20 second build to a standard elbow drop is fine? You can call most of Daniel Bryan's spots ten seconds before he does most of them. Again, it would be ridiculous to try to mix things up simply because some fans are bored by what they see in Cena's matches.

Overall, the rabid fans that watch every week have one general problem: they watch every week. If you watch wrestling, or anything for that matter, long enough you're going to see a few of the same things come up over and over. Here's the thing though: there are a lot of fans who either A, don't care that things happen again and again or B, don't watch every single episode and don't notice it over and over again. Wrestling should never be catered to the people that watch weekly, for that very simple reason: why try to get people to watch when they're already watching and you could bring in more fans with other stuff?

