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Hoopla of TV, Wooing Ads to Digital Media

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ANNOUNCEMENTS by giant media companies about new series and other programming ventures. Appearances by pop-culture personalities like the rappers Lupe Fiasco and MC Hammer. Performances by singers like the Lumineers, dancers and circus acts. Free breakfasts, lunches, hors d'oeuvres and drinks. Goody bags filled with giveaway items that include smartphone covers, computer monitor cleaning cloths and cookies.

It must be the television [upfront season](#), yes? Well, yes and no.

As networks and channels preview for Madison Avenue their lineups ahead of the 2013-14 television season — hence the term upfront — companies that produce digital content like online video and streaming video are also putting on presentations in hopes of attracting advertising dollars from marketers and agencies, either diverted from television budgets or additive spending.

So eager are those companies to woo the television crowd that they are sponsoring this week, under the aegis of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, five mornings, afternoons and evenings of events, receptions and parties under the banner of the [Digital Content NewFronts](#). To underline the difference, the official logo for the event depicts the words “Upfronts” with the “Up” [crossed out and replaced](#) by “New.”

Four companies opened the week on Monday: two digital media specialists, [Microsoft](#) and [Yahoo](#); the Weather Company, which considers itself an expert in content on four screens: television, computers, smartphones and tablets; and The Wall Street Journal, which sought to draw attention to its video content and advertising with an event that Journal executives called Newsfront 2013. (Upfronts, NewFronts, Newsfront — it can get pretty confusing.)

For a publisher known for print media seeking to become identified in digital realms, “you’ve got to get to critical mass,” Michael F. Rooney, chief revenue officer at The Journal, part of the Dow Jones & Company division of News Corporation, said in an interview after a 90-minute presentation.

The Journal, through offerings like [WSJ Live](#) and [WorldStream](#), now has “enc



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get people to pay attention,” said Mr. Rooney, who also spoke during the presentation along with senior executives like Lex Fenwick, chief executive at Dow Jones and publisher of The Journal; Gerard Baker, managing editor of The Journal; and Chris Cramer, head of video operations.

The executives announced video initiatives that include “WSJ Startup of the Year,” an episodic documentary for WSJ Live, sponsored by the New York Stock Exchange and evocative of a reality competition series. Starting on June 24, 25 entrepreneurs will work with more than two dozen mentors like Richard Branson, Tory Burch and MC Hammer; the recommendations of the mentors, and viewer votes, will guide editors of The Journal as they winnow the contenders and select a winning start-up.

For the Weather Company, the presentation was the second in less than four weeks; the company offered a look at its 2013-14 programming lineup for the Weather Channel cable network [at an event](#) in New York on April 3. Asked before the presentation if the company was taking too many bites of the upfront apple, David Kenny, chairman and chief executive at the Weather Company, replied: “There are different capabilities here, a ton of capabilities. There’s a lot of unique content you can only do in digital.”

Another reason to take part in the Digital Content NewFronts, Mr. Kenny said, was that among the buyers of commercial time at media agencies, “there are some who buy both” television and digital, “but there are many who focus on digital and we need to show them what’s here.”

“And for us, a big leader in mobile, showing what mobile can be is important,” he added. “The mobile audience is here, and wouldn’t be at a cable upfront.”

Among the announcements by the Weather Company was an expansion of video content under the banner of Weather Channel Films, which will be on the Weather Channel network as well [as available online](#), on smartphones and on tablets. The company is adding three Web series to the three it announced at the Weather Channel upfront; the series, with titles like “Alive” and “I Am Unstoppable,” will run from July through December.

“We want to superserve the weather enthusiast,” said Curt Hecht, chief global revenue officer at the Weather Company, using a term the company coined to describe its most ardent viewers, on whichever screens.

There will be an “investment in video content that you’ve never seen before from this company,” he added, a promise he underlined by repeating it at the end of the presentation.

Thumping house music — and dancers and acrobats dressed in sequined and gold-and-silver lamé body suits — welcomed guests to the Marquee club for the Microsoft presentation.

“As you know we are entering a world of always on,” said Keith Lorizio, vice president for United States sales and marketing at the Microsoft Advertising division of Microsoft. The setting was certainly “on,” with agency executives and employees lining the walls and crammed into the seats.

Mikhail Lapushner, chief executive at One Beat, a media company that focuses on creating content in the electronic dance music genre, announced a series of new shows that will be geared toward a young, dance-loving audience. “It’s all about the millennials,” Mr. Lapushner said.

One Beat, in partnership with Xbox, the Microsoft video game system, will create and distribute original content for the Web. Among the shows previewed were “Keep It Moving,” which chronicles the lives of four up-and-coming music promoters.

Contrasting with the youth-inspired theme, and the gyrating dancers who performed briefly at every transition between speakers, was a show called “Years of Living Dangerously,” a Showtime television series that will be focused on climate change; the show will also be seen online, at various Microsoft platforms.