

The Best TV Shows of the Decade

The Top Ten

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AMERICAN IDOL, FOX

DEBUT: JUNE 11, 2002

This annual Fox contest has breathed new life not only into broadcast TV (a new genre of family-friendly programming, accelerating integration of advertisers into show content), but also the music industry (Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, etc.), the telecommunications business (AT&T text-messaging) and Paula Abdul's career.

SURVIVOR, CBS

DEBUT: MAY 31, 2000

The original concept (throwing a motley crew of contestants into far-from-civilized territory) raised eyebrows when CBS first announced it. Now "Survivor" has become the granddaddy of reality-based competition programs. While its buzz has cooled, the methods its producers used to weave advertisers into the competition itself remain quite viable.



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TWO AND A HALF MEN, CBS

DEBUT: SEPT. 22, 2003

The sitcom has been pronounced dead so many times over the past decade that it's starting to feel like a morgue around here. NBC's one-time dominance of the format led to cookie-cutter half-hours about urbane (yet vapid) sophisticates and didn't play so well in the great middle part of the nation. CBS's randy take on single men has taken over as the king of the genre.

CSI, CBS

DEBUT: OCT. 6, 2000

When this drama, centered on a group of Las Vegas crime-scene investigators, arrived, TV viewers already had their fill of hour-long crime dramas. Yet over the years, CSI quickly spawned offshoots set in Miami and New York. Sure, these CBS dramas are formulaic—and how many bad puns can we take from David Caruso?—but they remain dependable players.



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LOST, ABC

DEBUT: SEPT. 22, 2004

The mystery-drama has long been a tough nut to crack. Get viewers engrossed in a program about the supernatural or the unexplained and they want a resolution at the end. "Lost" has given rise to all sorts of other story arcs, but none have fared successfully and few drive fans to search reruns for hidden clues, or take part in (advertiser sponsored) alternate-reality games.

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THE SOPRANOS, HBO

DEBUT: JAN. 10, 1999

This edgy, high-quality mobsters-in-therapy drama gave the Time Warner pay-cable network such a boost in terms of identity that every ad-supported cable network went scrambling to develop their own signature program—a movement that has eroded broadcast TV's dominance of the media and entertainment landscape.

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT, FOX

DEBUT: NOV. 2, 2003

The intense fan base that collected around this program served notice to broadcast networks that they need to find a way to make "smaller" shows work, whether by limiting episodes or using creative product integration. In an era of splintered audiences, any media property that can generate a loyal following has a good reason to exist.



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WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE, ABC

DEBUT: AUG. 16, 1999

"Who Wants To Be A Millionaire" was like crystal meth for ABC and rehab was tough. But without "Millionaire," there wouldn't be an "American Idol" (Fox used the lessons of oversaturation to keep "Idol" a must-see event), or even "Deal or No Deal." Keep in mind we had to suffer through knock-offs such as "The Weakest Link," too.

THE OSBOURNES, MTV

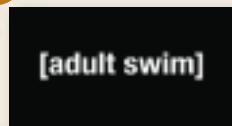
DEBUT: MARCH 5, 2002

Though the show's format seems cliché now, Ozzy Osbourne and his foul-mouthed family almost single-handedly invented the way we watch reality TV now. With gross-out gags and dialogue bleeps aplenty, we would not know so much about Lauren and Heidi or the Gosselins had the Osbournes not paved the way so memorably.



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ADULT SWIM, CARTOON NETWORK

DEBUT: MARCH 5, 2002

The decline of broadcast's reign over mass-reach television was accelerated thanks to demo-targeted programming lineups such as Cartoon Network's "Adult Swim," a nightly block dedicated to the college demographic of 18- to 24-years-old. What started out small eventually became huge among frat guys and stoners.

*Source: Adapted from *Advertising Age*, December 14, 2009.

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