

CW switches to next-day streaming

By MEG JAMES
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LOS ANGELES — After studying the viewing behavior of its young audience, the CW television network has switched strategies and is no longer delaying the online release of such popular shows as “Gossip Girl” and “The Vampire Diaries.”

CW — a joint venture of CBS Corp. and Warner Bros. — said last week that it would begin making episodes of its prime-time series available several hours after their initial television broadcast. The move is significant because it illustrates how television companies are moving quickly to adapt to rapid changes in technology in an effort to protect important revenue streams.

“Consumers have been telling us that they want the ability to watch their shows whenever and where ever they are,” said Rick Haskins, CW executive vice president of marketing and digital programs. “If we don’t listen to them, we will be missing an opportunity.”

In recent years the CW has made dramatic changes in its online strategy as the network has figured out how to better monetize digital views of its programs.

Early on, the network hesitated to put its shows on the Web at all. But since September 2010 the CW has been delaying the online release until three days after airing.

The three-day blackout was designed to boost the TV ratings, and thus protect the important TV advertising revenue. Advertisers pay premiums to reach viewers who watch shows on TV or within three days of their original airing.

Viewers were eager to see the latest episode. Research by the Warner Bros. anti-piracy group discovered that nearly a third of online viewers of CW’s most popular shows were so motivated that they watched them on a pirate website.

“And 50 percent of that consumption was done during the first three days after the television run,” Haskins said. “That’s a lot of money out of our pockets.”

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