



**GH HAS LOWEST MARKET SHARE OF ALL SOAPS
ABC SID TELLS ALL ABC SOAPS WHAT THEY CAN LEARN FROM DAYS OF OUR LIVES**

For the ratings week of January 18-22, 2010, General Hospital (GH) was the only soap opera with a "5" market share, as both One Life to Live (OLTL) and As The World Turns (ATWT), which have been vying with GH for last place, maintained a "6" market share from the previous week. GH experienced a steady decline in ratings in 2009 from April through mid-July when ratings spiked temporarily with Claudia's car crash, declined, then temporarily spiked again with the Carnival story. The first time that GH slumped to a "5" market share was the week of June 15, 2009, and the market share stayed at a "5" for the next 5 weeks.

GH has again shown a fundamental weakness in market share as GH has had a "5" market share in 3 of the last 5 weeks, despite great hype and publicity surrounding James Franco and the return of Jonathan Jackson, both of whom have been involved in major storylines. Unfortunately for GH, for ABC and for their advertisers, neither have improved ratings.

GH ratings are particularly disappointing when compared to The Young and the Restless (Y&R), the clear leader in the important 18-49 demographic, and Days of Our Lives (DOOL), which in recent weeks has overtaken GH for the second spot in the 18-49 demographic. A look back to the same week in January 2008 shows just how far GH's ratings have fallen:

3rd Week of January	Y&R	GH	DOOL
18-49 Rating Jan. 2008	1.8	1.8	1.4
18-49 Rating Jan 2010	1.8	1.3	1.3
18-49 Viewers Jan 2008	1,193,000	1,155,000	954,000
18-49 Viewers Jan 2010	1,214,000	838,000	866,000

The performance of Y&R and DOOL show that there is still an audience for a quality daytime drama, while GH's almost 30% decline shows what happens when a show relies on stunt casting and plot-point driven storylines vs. character driven storylines, while being devoid of historical and character integrity and true romance.

In the January 25, 2010, ABC Soaps in Depth (ABC SID) magazine, the article "What Your Soaps Can Learn from DAYS!" called attention to the hemorrhaging of viewers of all ABC soap operas and noted the root causes of ABC Daytime's failures by pointing out the strengths of DOOL. Many of the comments are the same as those promoted by the SOS/Save Our Soaps! General Hospital campaign, which have been referenced in many previous media releases. SOS! GH agrees with ABC SID on why GH's ratings have fallen. ABC SID recommends:

More relatable fare.

ABC SID mentions that DOOL now avoids outlandish stunts, but instead has villain Stefano engage more in verbal baiting rather than setting literal traps. DOOL is now relying on the interactions between the characters and the history of the characters rather than on stunts. GH, on the other hand, continually writes short term, stunt-driven plot points that end with the foregone conclusion more often than not.

Viewers of soap operas often tune in to see characters whom they can relate to going through the struggles and joys of life. Every soap needs a balance of different types of characters, but sadly, the GH writers seem to feel the need to write sleazy and/or violent stories for each of the few characters they actually write stories for on the canvas. Throughout 2007, when the focus of the storylines for lead characters Sonny and Jason focused on them as men first, who are fathers, lovers and mobsters, with the mob being only a part of their lives, viewers not only could relate more to them, but the stories had more depth and heart. Now Sonny and Jason are mobsters who happen to have children, have sexual relationships that lack depth and are inconsistent in their characterizations. The characters have lost much of their dimensionality and intrigue. Ratings for the past year reflect the lack of investment by viewers in these highly promoted characters in highly promoted yet flat, stunt-driven storylines.

Something for everyone.

DOOL has given nearly as much airtime to vets as they do to the younger characters. In the case of GH, viewers have clamored to see more of veteran and favorite characters on-screen in actual storylines, including Monica, Edward, Bobbie, Kate, and Alexis. Characters such as Matt and Epiphany have also become favorites of many viewers, even though they have either virtually disappeared from the canvas or are only on sporadically. Sadly, many of these characters are only used as support for special events rather than being involved in storylines that allow for growth and development.

GH has a vast arsenal of talent within its cast, yet it continually bombards the audience with storylines that feature the same characters over and over with little or no variety or story interaction. Storylines are heavily focused on one or two aspects of the show (i.e. the mob, the Spencers) instead of utilizing the variety of locations, characteristics and situations that could occur within Port Charles. Many storylines could and should occur concurrently with one another that could either cross over with one another, or simply run parallel, giving more of the cast a chance at being utilized fully and the audience more subject matter with which to become engrossed.

Notably, out of 250 episodes of GH during 2009, the top 3 characters with the highest number of episode counts (Sonny, Jason, Carly) were on-screen for 190 or more episodes. Interestingly, “newbie” Dominic/Dante first appeared June 22, 2009, and was on-screen during 113 episodes. This means that in the last six months of 2009, he was the character with the top episode count if one considers an annualized rate of over 226 out of 250 episodes. “Newbie” Olivia appeared in 92 episodes during the last six months of 2009, giving her an annualized count of 184 episodes. Basically, when the writing for the lead characters is erratic or new characters over-saturate the storylines, ratings suffer because fans of the out-of-character leads or of other characters feel there is no longer a reason to watch.

Not only might the actors need a break, the audience may need a break when the show is offering such low levels of variety or creativity. GH has become a soap opera of few characters with few storylines occurring, thereby making it uninteresting or unappealing to any viewer who is not a fan of one of the few characters either being featured or whose favorite, while being featured, is being written in a questionable manner.

Comparatively, top-rated soap opera Y&R had no character with more than 159 episode appearances in the same 250 episode-count. The cast is utilized in a much more equal manner, utilizing the younger and older cast members, as well as the veterans alongside the newcomers. Viewers of Y&R are entertained by a variety of characters within storylines that are more fully developed, simply because the writers use more of the town's population/cast.

“Not special effects or stunt casting, just good, old-fashioned romance.”

GH used to take time to develop relationships between characters that led to romance. These 'old-fashioned' romance storylines drew viewers in emotionally; viewers became connected to both characters

and the couple as a “character”. Some of the pairings took long and winding roads to be together, while others were established and had trials and tribulations to get through together, with the audience rooting for them the entire time. Such pairings include Lois and Ned, Luke and Laura, Kevin and Lucy, Monica and Alan, Duke and Anna, Frisco and Felicia, Stephan and Katherine, and more recently Carly and Jax, Sonny and Kate, Jason and Elizabeth, Robin and Patrick and Johnny and Lulu. Viewers know many of these characters intimately and feel as if they have a connection with them and, therefore, want to see them in romantic, loving, and yes, exciting and interesting relationships.

When comparing ratings with regard to romantic couples that were on canvas vs. those recently on or currently on canvas, the current pairings are falling terribly short. During 2008, when Sonny and Kate and Jason and Elizabeth were in romantic relationships that were based on either a well-defined backstory or long character history, the 18-49 demographic rating was 1.8, while the HH rating was 2.6. Comparably, in August of 2009, when it was promoted that Jason tells Sam 'I love you' for the first time, the 18-49 rating was 1.2 and the HH rating was a 1.8. Upon the second instance of this occurrence in December of 2009, again, the 18-49 rating was 1.2 and the HH rating was 1.8. The pairing of Sonny and Claudia produced even lower numbers, and Sonny and Olivia's promoted 'romance scenes' have netted a 1.8 in the 18-49 demographic and a 1.9 in HH. While this 1.9 may seem like a high number, the day of the heavily promoted 'steamy kiss' between Sonny and Olivia actually fell from a 2.1 the day before, showing that the audience was not interested in what was being promoted. Similar results have occurred with the current Elizabeth and Nikolas pairing.

Corresponding with these results are those relating to stunt casting and special effects. As mentioned before, while the 'hit and run' of Claudia, the Carnival brought temporary spikes in viewership, those numbers were not sustained. Viewers were intrigued enough to tune in to see what might be changing or “fixed”, only to tune out when they realized that nothing of substance had changed. As supported by the ratings, once these 'stunts' were over, GH would go back to being the disappointing soap opera it has become to many viewers. **This pattern shows there is still an audience wanting to return to GH if real changes are made, but for how long?** If viewer (and magazine editor) concerns and desires continue to be ignored and ratings continue to drop, it is unlikely that those viewers will want to return and become re-invested.

The writers of GH need to recognize that out-of-character writing for well-established characters makes it hard for viewers to relate to what is happening on-screen, making it hard for long-time faithful viewers to remain invested in the characters, the storylines and the show. The writers need to give more equal airtime to more characters and include them in developing storylines that allow for character growth and development. Importantly, they also need to recognize that many viewers tune in to soap operas for romance. They need to pair, and reunite, rootable couples to help viewers become emotionally invested in the pairings and storylines. GH, while currently a flailing soap opera, has the potential to be not only a good soap opera, but a great soap opera. Going back to these basic soap tenets that DOOL and Y&R utilize and that ABC SID endorsed, while still respecting its own history and unique style of writing, could propel GH again to be one of the highest rated shows on daytime television.

Every week, more fans and former viewers of GH are joining together with fans of Sonny and Kate, Jason and Elizabeth, Patrick and Robin, and Jax and Carly as part of the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign. All share in a common goal of asking ABC/Disney to listen to the viewers and make changes by writing storylines that are relatable to viewers, delivering character-driven storylines with the airtime being more balanced among more of the cast, and creating rootable couples that viewers can become emotionally invested in. For more information or to comment on the campaign, contact Dana L. Meyer or Kecia K. Picard at saveoursoapgh@gmail.com, visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital page on Facebook, follow on twitter @SOS_GH or visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital website at www.saveoursoapgh.com.