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Megyn Kelly Hardly a Lock to Succeed on NBC

Ratings and loyalty in one time slot and one network don't always translate to another



By Ben Bogardus

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Megyn Kelly is on a roll (<http://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/programming/megyn-kelly-moving-nbc-news/162121>). Coming off a high-profile election season, a highly-rated cable news show, and a new book, she's decided to take her talents to NBC. Word is that she will make between \$15 million and \$20 million per year hosting a new talk program that **will take over the third hour of *Today*** (<http://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/programming/megyn-kellys-nbc-daytime-show-replace-third-hour-today/162179>) and a Sunday night news magazine.

But Kelly might be wise to put some of that cash in the bank. The move won't be as easy as she may hope.

Just because she's going somewhere, doesn't mean her viewers will follow. There's a long list of well-known anchors and entertainers who struggled after moving from one network to another. Most famously, Katie Couric never really got out of third place after leaving *Today* to host the CBS Evening News in 2006. A wide range of personalities both inside and outside the news realm have dealt with so-so ratings and relatively short-lived shows when they left their traditional network home. People seem to like seeing their television hosts where they're used to seeing them, and network executives aren't known for their patience when staring at low ratings.

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If that's not tough enough to overcome, Kelly will also face some political obstacles. Among cable news fans, there's a big block of Fox News viewers, and a big block of MSNBC viewers. The two groups do not intersect. Many conservatives who love Fox would never think of watching news on the parent company of liberal MSNBC, even if a former beloved Fox anchor works there. Plus, Kelly's stock among hardcore Donald Trump supporters has gone down after her war of words with the then-candidate led to accusations of anti-Trump bias.

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Left-wing MSNBC fans also are going to be suspicious of Kelly, until she can prove she's not bringing her Fox News sensibilities to 30 Rock. In what's sure to be yet another hyper-partisan year, having an anchor associated with what a large chunk of viewers, rightly or wrongly, deride as the "Faux News Channel" could be a tough sell.

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Sunday night is a really bad time slot for any news magazine not named *60 Minutes*. But it will be especially difficult for NBC. That's because any potential Kelly-led show would be off the air for about seven months a year, when you factor in *Sunday Night Football* and the summer. The plan, as it now appears, seems to lack the consistency needed to build a fan base.

NBC also needs to make a compelling case for viewers to choose Kelly's new show instead of *60 Minutes*, which has been a top-rated program for nearly 50 years. NBC's *Dateline* currently struggles against CBS' flagship news show when they face off on post-football Sundays. Will Kelly's show fare any better? It will be difficult, because news habits, like old habits, die hard.

Talk shows hosted by hard news anchors begin to lose their popularity as the morning goes on. By 9 a.m., during what is reportedly Kelly's new time slot, viewers have just seen at least four hours of serious news on local broadcasts and on the Matt Lauer- and Savannah Guthrie-led *Today*. Demographically, the audience is also heavily female at this point in the day, and historically female viewers have sought out lighter fare like celebrity news, fashion, fun chit-chat, and lifestyle segments. That's what seems to work with morning mainstays like *Live with Kelly* and *The View*. While NBC may be trying to counter-program and give viewers something different at that hour, it will be a risk given the type of people who are home and watching TV from 9 to 10 a.m.

To be successful at daytime TV, Kelly will have to either switch her style and become more "fluffy," or hope daytime viewers decide they're still in the mood for another hour of her style of harder-edged and politically-pointed news coverage. Unfortunately for Kelly, that doesn't seem likely given the nature of late-morning television.

But, on the other hand, Megyn Kelly may end up succeeding where others have failed. She's done it her entire career. She beat long odds getting into the television news industry in the first place. She went from being a Chicago attorney, to a local news reporter, to Fox News, to having her own prime-time show in just a few short years. That path is practically unheard of on television. Then, she survived a very public feud with then-candidate Donald Trump – someone who's known to hold grudges. And just last month, her new book, the first she's authored, debuted at No. 1 on the New York Times bestseller list.

In a life filled with challenges, Kelly has always beaten expectations. Her move to NBC may turn into yet another opportunity to prove her critics wrong.

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