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Nine feels the heat from TV rivals

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The arrival of Ten Network's *MasterChef 3* and success of Seven Network's prime-time schedule are putting growing pressure on Nine Network.

So far this year, the night-time audience of the Nine stations – which are owned by Nine Entertainment Co down the east coast and Bruce Gordon's WIN Corp in Adelaide and Perth – has shrunk 6.1 per cent. Seven and Ten's audiences have climbed 12.7 per cent and 6.3 per cent respectively (Seven is owned by Seven West Media).

The numbers cover all the networks' channels, that is, their main channels and their digital off-shoots.

For the main Nine channel, the picture is uglier: its audience has collapsed 19.5 per cent so far this year, including a 20.4 per cent decline in its core target market of people aged 25 to 54.

The other networks have also seen the night-time audiences of their main channels slide this year. The main Seven channel is down 3.8 per cent, while the main Ten channel is down 13.7 per cent.

The Seven and Ten networks' overall numbers have been boosted by their digital channels.

In Seven's case, 7Two and 7mate are generating good audience figures. Ten's numbers have been boosted by Eleven, the youth-orientated digital channel it launched on January 11. The audience numbers for Ten's all-sport digital channel, One, have been flat – and low – this year.

One was relaunched earlier this week, with the addition of non-sport programs between 6pm and 10.30pm on weekdays. The changes have lifted One's night-time audience share from about 1 per cent to more than 3 per cent.

"We've been trialling a general entertainment line-up on One since the start of the year," Ten chief programming officer David Mott said in a statement.

"We're delighted that One's combination of premium sport and prime-time general entertainment programming is already resonating with viewers and advertisers."

Nine's digital channels Go and Gem are also generating respectable audience numbers, but they are not pulling enough viewers to make up for the main Nine channel's decline.

The three Nine channels' combined audience has declined in all age groups. Their biggest falls have been among people aged 16 to 39 (down 12.1 per cent) and 18 to 49 (down 10.8 per cent).

Television networks give advertisers "make-goods" – usually in the form of free "bonus" ads – when their audience numbers are lower than expected.

Media buyers said most of the bonus ads Nine was giving away were on Gem, the digital channel it introduced in September. The running of free ads on Gem explains why it had just \$1 million of ad revenue in April, according to media information company SMI, compared with \$7 million on Go.

The Australian Financial Review

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