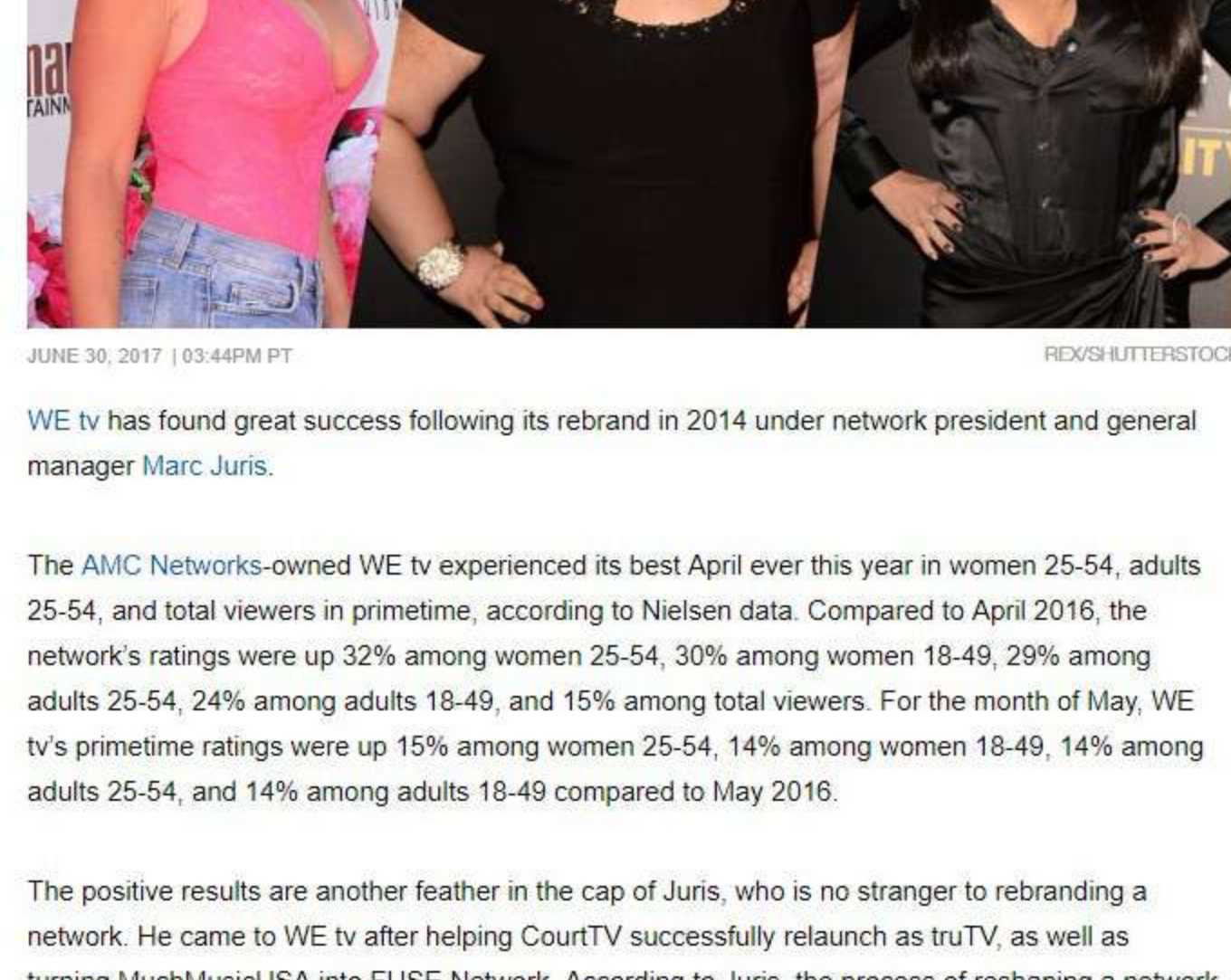


# WE tv Rebrand as 'Real Reality Network' Pays Off in Spades

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WE tv has found great success following its rebrand in 2014 under network president and general manager Marc Juris.

The AMC Networks-owned WE tv experienced its best April ever this year in women 25-54, adults 25-54, and total viewers in primetime, according to Nielsen data. Compared to April 2016, the network's ratings were up 32% among women 25-54, 30% among women 18-49, 29% among adults 25-54, 24% among adults 18-49, and 15% among total viewers. For the month of May, WE tv's primetime ratings were up 15% among women 25-54, 14% among women 18-49, 14% among adults 25-54, and 14% among adults 18-49 compared to May 2016.

The positive results are another feather in the cap of Juris, who is no stranger to rebranding a network. He came to WE tv after helping CourtTV successfully relaunch as truTV, as well as turning MuchMusicUSA into FUSE Network. According to Juris, the process of reshaping a network is as much about heart as it is about viewer data.

"It's all about understanding your audience and having passion and a point of view," Juris told *Variety*. "It's not about graphics. It's about what you're trying to say and represent. It's about having a clear, consistent voice... Creating a brand can't be all research and science-driven. It has to ignite your soul a little bit. You know when something is great. Sometimes it's hard to get there, so you have to be patient and always look to improve. You have to be open and flexible and recognize when a great idea is coming your way."



WE tv Greenlights 'Growing Up Hip Hop,' 'Marriage Boot Camp' Spinoffs

Juris is a self-described TV addict, who jokes he prefers watching reality series to spending time with real people. He has found particular success with new unscripted series following reality stars who initially appeared on other shows. Take, for example, Kendra Wilkinson. Wilkinson first rose to national fame during her time as one of "Playboy" founder Hugh Hefner's three girlfriends, which was documented on the E! reality series "Girls Next Door." She eventually got her own E! spinoff series, "Kendra," which aired 45 episodes between 2009 and 2011. Shortly after parting ways with E!, Wilkinson launched "Kendra on Top" with WE tv, with the show's first season reaching 7.5 million total viewers for the network. On June 23, Season 6 of the show premiered and was among the top five ad-supported cable telecasts in its time period among women 18-49 and women 25-54.

"WE tv, they are so 100% with me on my journey," Wilkinson told *Variety*. "They believe in family. They believe in telling a truthful story. They believe in getting the most authentic story we could put out there. They're geniuses at that."

"WE tv is honest TV," she continued. "They are giving you real TV, real stories, real pain, and real truth to what life is really all about. There's no sugar coating anything and they do it in the most beautiful way they can. I am very thankful to be a part of WE tv. This is a real reality network."

And then of course there is June "Mama June" Shannon, who first appeared on TLC's "Toddlers & Tiaras." She and her family were then the subject of their own series, "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo," which drew significant ratings for TLC in its initial run, but was canceled in 2014. Now, Shannon is back in the limelight thanks to her new WE tv series, "Mama June: From Not to Hot," in which she lost over 300 pounds.

That show is currently the number one new reality show of 2017, averaging more than 2 million viewers per episode. It also showed growth from the season mid-way point through to the finale, ultimately increasing viewership by 48%.

Another successful brand on the network is "Marriage Boot Camp: Reality Stars," the cast of which has included "Jersey Shore" alum Mike "The Situation" Sorrentino, "The Hills" stars Heidi Montag and Spencer Pratt, and "Mob Wives'" Renee Graziano, among many others throughout its run. In 2016, the network partnered with "Millionaire Matchmaker" star Patti Stanger for a new reality series called "Million Dollar Matchmaker," which reached 12.4 million total viewers in its first season.

"We're at a really important moment in time given the impact of social media on entertainment and really how everyone interacts, I think that has really been helping drive reality TV's success," Juris said. "I think you want your brand to be known for one thing and in the days of only 500 channels, that was easier. Now there are so many options, you need to be clearly defined. There are great characters and stories in unscripted, and they have a very specific viewer. We really do want people to come with an anticipation of some sort of experience. It's about representing a type of program or experience the viewer will get."

Content creators credit Juris and Lauren Geilert, WE tv's executive vice president of development and original programming, with making the network a go-to destination for new unscripted series. Leslie Greif, whose Thinkfactory Media produces "Mama June" and "Marriage Boot Camp: Reality Stars," said that his personal relationships at the network have been a driving force in their work together.

"When you know people like Marc and Lauren, they humanize the network in terms of dealing with them," Greif told *Variety*. "It's never like 'The network says this,' and you're intimidated by this big, monolithic thing. When we think of WE tv, we think of the smiles and the warmth and the partnership that both Marc and Lauren have." It was that human quality that led to Greif bringing "Mama June" to WE tv.

"We had an idea that when you take interesting characters like Mama June who have a story to tell and their stories aren't finished, it's like the movie business where you do a sequel and say, 'What happened next?'" he said. "We thought that would be a real touchstone to America because she was such an electric character when she was on television. Of course, that's the kind of conversation you have with Marc and Lauren and they say, 'Great idea, see where it goes.'"

So what is it that makes people like Wilkinson and Shannon so captivating to viewers years after they first debuted?

"Their stories aren't finished," Juris said. "They provide a sense of familiarity. You already know these people, these characters. Mama June is a well-known TV character. If I told you someone you didn't know was going to lose 300 pounds, you really wouldn't care. But because you know who she was, that journey became a lot more interesting and a lot more jaw-dropping when you saw the transformation. We all love things that are familiar but different, so a character you know is a shortcut that lets you get right into the story."

FILED UNDER: Amc Networks, Marc Juris, We Tv

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