The following is a memorandum from the business manager of a television station.

“Over the past year, our late-night news program has devoted increased time to national news and less time to weather and local news. During this time period, most of the complaints received from viewers were concerned with our station’s coverage of weather and local news. In addition, local businesses that used to advertise during our late-night news program have just canceled their advertising contracts with us. Therefore, in order to attract more viewers to the program and to avoid losing any further advertising revenues, we should restore the time devoted to weather and local news to its former level.”

Write a response in which you discuss what specific evidence would be needed in order to evaluate the argument and explain how the evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.

The argument reaches the conclusion that the television station must restore the time devoted to weather and local news to its former level. This conclusion is built on the premise that reducing the time allocated to such news led to many complaints, and that local businesses cancelled their advertising contracts with the late-night news program. However, in reaching their conclusion, the business manager fails to provide specific evidence to back up their claims. There are three main pieces of evidence that are necessary to evaluate the argument.

First, the business manager must provide evidence that the complaints received from viewers were representative of the news program's audience. It is possible that only a very small fraction of the audience did not like the changes made to the program, and that the number of complaints was not significant enough. If the total audience of the program was, say, 5 Million, and the complaints came from 5000 people, what may look like a large number of complaints amounts to about 0.1% of the audience. In fact, it is also possible that the size of the audience increased as a result of the change. If this were true, then the television station may even benefit from keeping the change, and would perhaps gain a larger audience. Moreover, by broadcasting national news, the station may be more likely to gain a pan-national audience. Hence, substantiative evidence is necessary in this regard, for any justification in favour of reversing the news program's decisions.

Second, the argument must state the exact reasons for local businesses canceling their advertising contracts with the program. It is a possibility that these businesses did not attract enough customers to keep their companies afloat, or that the news program did not drive enough sales to these establishments. In this case, the manager's claim that this is a reason to switch back to old programming would prove unfounded. It is also possible that the hosts of the program, or the employees at the television station did not want to endorse the products of these businesses - the argument puts forth no evidence that could connect the canceling of contracts to the change in scheduling.

Third, the argument does not effectively prove that moving back to the previous format would attract more viewers, or that advertising revenue levels would be preserved. Evidence related to such assumptions should be explicitly specified, since the station could potentially lose a lot of money by shifting back to its old format. It may be the case that the complaints were made by people who simply wanted to stay updated on the weather, and were unhappy with the reduced time allotted to it. In this case, the business manager assumes that no other decisions can be taken to address these complaints. A portion of the screen could perhaps be used to update local weather conditions, as an easy fix. If evidence were to arise that no other possibilities were explored or brainstormed, then the argument's conclusion stands unwarranted.

In conclusion, the argument, as it stands now, considerably fails to make a persuasive case. It fails to provide substantiative evidence to back up its claims, and makes multiple stated and unstated assumptions. The business manager should evaluate the situation logically, looking into the exact reasons for the complaints and the canceled contracts. Viewing numbers could also be used to gauge what portion of the program's audience has been retained, and what new audience has been accumulated. Only with this kind of comprehensive approach, can the television station take an informed decision on how to modify its schedule to cater to its audience.