TUSunday

THE SIMPLE INVENTION THAT...



Put men firmly in charge of what we watch on TV.

CLICKER

By MICHAEL GILTZ

ORGET the Internet. The most earth-shat-tering, life-changing angustien of the second intering. Hit-changing innovation of the second half of the twentieth century is ... the remote central. It's changed how we watch. It's changed how we watch as the second in the secon

to author of The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows and the Senior Vice President for Research at USA Networks.

David Marane at ad agency heavyweight J. Walter Thompson agrees. The remote is holding both programs and commercials to a higher standard, says Marans, the senior media researcher there.

CLICK! It happens every Monday night. TNT and USA face off with competing wreatling shows. Young men sit in front of the TV-remote in hand. And they ping pong back and forth

WWF with a head-enap-ping speed that would make their grandmothers

Tve never seen anything like it, says Brooks. We've done minute-by-minute rating tracks, and whenever one of them bumps up, the other bumps down. They must be sitting there with the remote glued to their hands."

CLICK! The remote has The probably had a larger affect on television programming than anything paraming than anything the principle of the principl up for grabs now, and no one can take a time slot for granted.

A glance at the prime time winners for Tuesday or Wednesday - two of the most competitive nights of the week — shows a checkerboard of champione, with audiences jumping from ABC at 8 to CBS at 8:30 and NBC at 9.

But don't look for a pattern: the following week might find different winners in every time slot. You wouldn't have seen that checkerboarding 10 or 15 years ago," says Brooks. "People are reaching too quickly for the remote."

History of the remote control

ZENITH says it gave birth to the remote control in 1960. It called the invention Lazy Bones (what kind of sloth wouldn't get up to change the channel?).

Like any newborn, the remote was attached to its mother --- an umbilical cord stretched from Lazy Bones to the TV set.

Zenith offered a truly remote control in 1955 called the Flashmatic. But no one paid much attention.

In the mid-'70s, remotes were only available on 10

By 1990, about 90 percent of all TVs came with remotes — the rest were probably small portables.

hold on to the remote more tenaciously than women. The remote repre-sents power and control, explains Dr. Joy Browne, whose syndicated talk show debuts this fall at the same time her new book "It's a Jungle Out There, Jane: Understanding the Male Animal' (Crown) hits

the stores.
"Men have a shorter attention span and they've been hardwired to go looking for danger."

So what can women do? "Buy two remotes," she

CLICK! Networks those sneaky devils - are the most part hiding their commercials.

CLICK! Yes, men really In the B.R. era (Before Remotel, a batch of commercials came at the end of shows, safe in the knowledge that viewers only had two or three other programs to turn to and were ing those wrestling fans probably too lary to get up indulge in every Monday and change the channel anyway. The remote ended

To fight back, NBC pioneered "seamless" programming one show leads right into the next, with right into the next, with have even changed the way commercials coming a few TV sets look. The knot on minutes before the end of a the TV set used to be a show and a comedic kicker thrown in to keep you wasthing until the next one starts. It works great - for

the most part the remote is how you're
"The enly problem we supposed to operate it. I

have is with movies," says USA's Brooks, "because we still have to run those interminable credits. You'll notice the credits are getting smaller and smaller. There's even been talk about some networks actually starting the next show on half the acreen while the credits are still running for the first one."

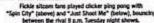
CLICK! Back to Tuesday night for a second "Spin City" and "Just Shoot Me" were in a particularly vicious struggle at 9 p.m. this season. (Come fall, Spin City moves to 8.) One show would dominate for three or four weeks, then the other one and then back again - it was a slower version of the ping-pongnight

Just when one sitcom thought it had the upperhand, the remote control showed them otherwise.

CLICK! Remote controls huge prominent dial, says Brocks. Now most of them are disappearing behind a panel somewhere because



averne and Shirley" pre-date the clicker -- and lucky for there. They might not have survived a zap from the lap.



have a 36-inch large-screen TV and I assume somewhere on the set you can manually change channels.

But I haven't seen it." CLICKI Hold on a secend; that commercial is end, that commercial is really good. Teople are very interested in commer-cials, insists Marans. There's a myth that they skip them. Young males are the biggest remote central users, but the world is not

made up of young males."

OK, but people sap shows they don't like and they'll rap bad commercials, too. That's one reason commercials have become bolder

and more entertaining.

CLICK!" Laverne &
Shirley" is lucky it hit
primetime before the
remote control took hold. No one really liked the show, but it was unobjec-tionable and it was hammocked between the smash hits "Happy Days" and "Three's Company," in today's remote-happy envirunment, too many viewers

CLICK! Here's the story of a levely lady . . . * Classet theme songs like that one from "The Brady Bunch" will stop any channel surfer at least for a

But, ironically, the remote has turned them into a relie.

is almost completely gone, says Renald C. Simon, a curater at the Museum of Television & Radio

They have to jump right into the show with an immediate hook

If networks don't, they know impatient viewers will be tempted to check out the competition until

the show really starts. And sometimes they

won't come back. CLICK'In 1993, the Cable Reregulation Act was a big victory for the broad-caster — and one of their key demands was the right for every station to demand a low channel number shead of all those peaky cable networks. bumped popular channels like CNN and ESPN much higher on the dial.

Score one for the networks? Nope. People really like those channels, and with the remote they're only a click away. Even worse, when anmoone starts surf-ing at channel 37, it takes them a long while to get back to the major networks. "The breedensters have in

noka.

By and large it's true that the lower you are on the dial, the higher your rat-

However, that edge is shrinking in importance effect created a broadcast every year. "In the early

hette for themselves," says

80s it used to be a tremen dous advantage to be positioned lower," says Brooks. Within a few years it will probably disappear altogether. And that's because of the remote."

CLICK! POWER OFF!

