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ABC: Not Another Barack Channel

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Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama's half-hour campaign commercial is scheduled to run Wednesday night on all of the major television networks – except ABC.

The senator from Illinois this month arranged to buy Wednesday's 8 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. slot on CBS, NBC and Spanish-language network Univision. Fox Broadcasting joined the field after Major League Baseball agreed to delay the start time of Wednesday's World Series game.

Walt Disney Co.-owned ABC, however, initially balked at selling its 8 p.m. Wednesday slot, saying it didn't want to bump its regularly scheduled series, "Pushing Daisies," even though the whimsical show has been struggling in the ratings.

ABC executives said the earlier decision not to accept the Obama infomercial was due to the problem of filling the second half hour of the 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. time period – and not for political reasons. (Scheduling conflicts did not stop NBC from quickly clearing its hour to make room for the commercial. NBC preempted its hour-long series "Knight Rider" and expanded the game show "Deal or No Deal" from 60 to 90 minutes to fill the extra time.)

CBS pushed "The New Adventures of Old Christine" to 8:30 p.m. and dumped an episode of its new series "Gary Unmarried." Fox persuaded Major League Baseball to delay by about 15 minutes the start time of Wednesday's game so the network could air the Obama ad at 8 p.m. in the Eastern and Central time zones. In California, the campaign commercial will follow the game.

Then, about 10 days ago, ABC changed its mind. It told the campaign the Wednesday 8 p.m. slot would be available after all. "We ultimately offered them the time slot that they had requested," a network spokesman said today.

ABC had planned to charge slightly more than \$1 million for the half hour, a higher rate than what Fox, CBS and NBC charged the Democrat for their time.

But it was too late.

"We had already committed our resources by the time they offered us the time," said an Obama campaign spokesman.

That explanation struck some as odd, however, given the Obama money-raising machine generated \$150 million in donations in September alone. "The Obama campaign has the resources," said Peter Sealey, adjunct marketing professor at the Peter Drucker Graduate Management School at the Claremont Graduate University.

Sealey said that if the Obama campaign had bought the time on ABC it would have accomplished the rare feat of what's called a "roadblock." Channel flippers would have a hard time avoiding the ad because it was seemingly everywhere.

"It's amazing that they got everyone – but not ABC, one of the top-rated television networks," Sealey said. "Maybe the campaign decided that they didn't need the extra ratings points."

-- Meg James