

5 minute read | Feb 2, 2026

Missing metadata in FAST programming may be hindering ad revenue



Content Discovery

Contextual Advertising

Across the broadening streaming landscape, free ad-supported streaming TV (FAST) continues to gain momentum. The number of available FAST channels increased by [nearly 9%](#) between Q3 and Q4 2025¹, as content owners and publishers broaden their distribution strategies to engage viewers across this expanding landscape.

The growth of FAST hasn't gone unnoticed by advertisers, especially as revenue projections continue to climb. Of note, Goldman Sachs projects the value of the combined FAST universe to grow by [15% each year until 2027](#). The rise of FAST channels also aligns with shifting business models, as streaming content accounted for 46.4% of ad-supported TV in Q3 2025, up from 42.4% in Q1².

More than 46% of streaming content was ad-supported in Q3 2025

– Nielsen's The Gauge

The downside in this scenario, however, is that quite a bit of the programming aimed for FAST channels isn't ready for primetime—at least from an advertising perspective. That's because it's missing key information that can be used to inform ad buying decisions. Recent Gracernote [Global Video Data](#), for example, shows that only 43% of sports programming headed to U.S. FAST channels in December included original air date information, making it impossible for programmatic systems to identify live sports competitions.

The importance of content signals

In the world of programmatic advertising—which is how the [vast majority of CTV ads](#) are bought and sold—everything runs on data. For buying decisions in programmatic systems, metadata “signals” attached to a piece of content provide guidance on whether specific inventory is a good fit for an advertiser.

At its onset, FAST was the great content equalizer. That's because anyone with a library of content and a technology partner could develop and distribute a channel. While many prominent media companies are now well invested in FAST strategies, standardized, holistic metadata across FAST remains far less present than it is in more established CTV channels, including vMVPDs and SVOD.

The result? Lost opportunity.

To better understand the scope of the lost opportunities, we analyzed programming headed for FAST channels in the four markets with [the most FAST channels](#)¹: the U.S., Great Britain, Germany and Canada. For this study, we looked at sports programs and TV shows because of the premium ad rates that select programs can command. And importantly, we found significant gaps across both programming types.

Sports programming and original broadcast date information

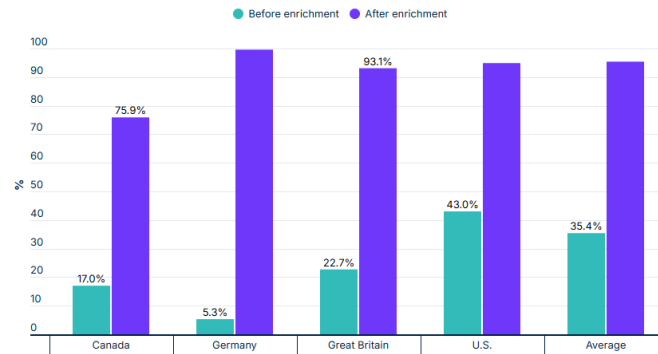
Information about a program's original (i.e., first) airing is extremely important for both live sports and show premiers. While FAST channels have yet to distribute a meaningful amount of original programming, the amount of live sports continues to grow. In November 2025, 37% of sports programming was live¹.

Unfortunately, sports programming is often missing the metadata that indicates that it's new and live—two attributes that denote the most premium of CTV inventory. In our recent study, only 35.4% of the sports programming headed for FAST channels in the U.S., Great Britain, Germany and Canada, on average, included original air date information when it was submitted to Gracenote for enrichment. Percentages were notably lower in Germany and Canada, at only 5.3% and 17%, respectively.

The upside here is that the creators submitted their programs for metadata normalization and enrichment, which dramatically increased the percentages of programming with this key information. In Germany, for example, this process increased the percentage of sports programming with an original air date by 94.3%.

Metadata enrichment adds key information for sports programming on FAST channels

Sports programs with original broadcast date information



Read as: 17% of the sports programs distributed across FAST channels in Canada included original broadcast date information when they were submitted for metadata enrichment. After metadata enrichment, 75.9% of these programs included original broadcast date information.

Source: Gracenote Global Video Data; December 2025

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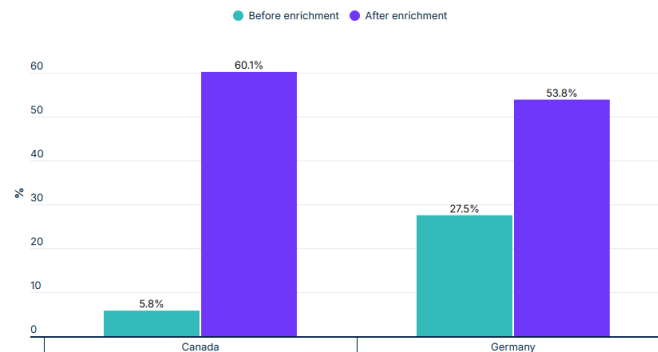


Contextual data signals and advertising opportunities

For brands and agencies, especially those looking to broaden their advertising strategies with [contextual targeting](#), rating and genre information will become increasingly relevant across the CTV landscape. Among these two attributes, however, rating information, which can be critical for brand safety, is often missing from FAST programming. Across markets, the absence is most notable in TV programming for Germany and Canada. Enriching these programs, however, resulted in increases of 26.3% and 54.3%, respectively.

Metadata enrichment adds key information for TV programs on FAST channels

TV shows with rating information



Read as: 5.8% of the TV programs distributed across FAST channels in Canada lacked genre information when they were submitted for

From missing data to uniform and enriched data

The metadata gap is a global one, but it's a solvable one. It's also one that will become increasingly important as audiences continue shifting to CTV for their TV experiences. In Q3 2025, CTV accounted for 51.2% of total TV usage in the U.S.³, while traditional live TV viewing accounted for 43.3% (time-shifted viewing accounted for the remainder).

In addition to the importance of complete and uniform metadata, today's content landscape will increasingly need deeper, more descriptive metadata to fulfill contextual targeting campaigns. Primary genre, for example, is a good starting point, but deeper metadata enrichment enables much richer contextual targeting opportunities.

In FAST, for example, 7.1% of the available programming in December had an action genre¹. That's just over 2,500 individual programs. By incorporating richer content attributes, such as mood, year of production, rating, theme and scenario, content targeting becomes increasingly more personalized.



Description: A recently widowed sheriff buries his pain behind his dedication to his job and community.

Rating: TV14

Genres: Crime drama, Action, Western

Year: 2012

Language: English

Video Descriptors:

- Concept source:** Novel series
- Mood:** Suspenseful, Compelling, Gritty
- Theme:** Justice, Immorality, Partnership, Rebuilding
- Scenario:** Solving a murder mystery, Aftermath of a murder, Cover-up, Personal relationships, Vigilante justice, Overcoming adversity



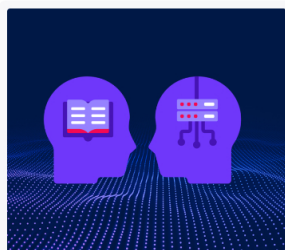
The video landscape has become increasingly congested, but compared with the early days of streaming, ad-supported models have grown dominant. Through this lens, high-quality content is no longer the key to success. Content needs to be discoverable by audiences, as well as by the programmatic systems that have become the gatekeepers of most CTV ad transactions.

Notes

1. Gracenote Global Video Data
2. Nielsen's [The Gauge](#)
3. Nielsen Audience Insights Data (Nielsen NPOWER, Nielsen Media Impact)

Related tags [FAST](#) [Sports](#) [Streaming](#) [TV](#)

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