

How Did NBC Become the Pillar of Comedy in the US and the World?

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The National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the oldest broadcasting network in the United States, has been in Americans' lives since the 1920s. It started off as a radio program originating from New York City and transitioned into a television broadcasting company in 1939. Although NBC was primarily envisioned to serve as an informational outlet, the network gained its stronghold in the industry with its entertainment-oriented efforts which essentially formed the blueprint for American television comedy.

NBC became a leader in the field of technological advancements in the 1950s. At the start of the decade, when only 9% of the US population owned a television in their home, this number had skyrocketed to 90% by the end of the '50s. NBC had played a big role in terms of giving indirect incentives to Americans to acquire televisions. For example, by 1951, NBC had established a coast-to-coast television network and by 1953, became a pioneer in the field of colored broadcasting with coast-to-coast transmission. With its quick and effective reach across the country, NBC consequently became the star television network of the United States in just a few years. Amidst all the fame it had acquired in the 1950s, NBC did not fall into a state of slackness and instead, launched a number of innovative concepts some of which even lasted until the present day. Among these were the first network early-morning show *Today* (1952-), television's first successful late-night talk show *The Tonight Show* (1954-), and the famous *Saturday Night Live* (1975-). By the 1960s, NBC had branched out from just comedy and news and started streaming political events and sports such as the presidential debate of Kennedy vs. Nixon, the coverage of the assassination of President Kennedy, the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, and the 1969 Super Bowl. With its successful explorations of new fields, NBC still went on to be the comedy pillar of American broadcasting and shaped the American comedic television that we have today.

NBC has been home to many remarkable sitcoms over the years. A few of the most notable ones include *Seinfeld* (1989-98), *Friends* (1994-2004), *The Office* (2005-13), and much more. Nearly every sitcom that NBC aired had some kind of a cultural impact on the American

people, which is why it inevitably became the comedy “factory” of US network television. For instance, *Seinfeld* was one of the most revolutionary and influential programs in television history. *Seinfeld*, like many of NBC’s major situation comedies, introduced the concept of “nothingness” and every-day life into TV shows. It broke social norms and made the characters talk about some socially disturbing topics to discuss on TV at the time such as masturbation, sex lives, etc. With its rapid-paced, quick-cutting, music-led style, "Seinfeld" was ahead of its time in the 1990s, leading to frenetic hit shows like *30 Rock*, and *Parks and Recreation*. Another hit show *Friends* influenced TV in many ways as well. *Friends* ran for 10 seasons on NBC and became a worldwide phenomenon where the show’s impact includes Jennifer Aniston’s widely copied hairstyle “The Rachel” and Joey’s (Matt LeBlanc) famous catchphrase “How you doin’?” *Friends* also had cultural revelations for TV like no other before it. The show included a homosexual wedding scene for the first time on TV between characters Carol and Susan and also included a transsexual woman. Although Carol and Susan were not allowed to kiss on the episode and Chandler’s father who later transitioned into a woman was not played by a transsexual actor, these episodes were a landmark for the journey of LGBTQ+ representation in TV.

As the general sense of humor of the American people evolved through decades, NBC never left their leader seat at the table, because they never lagged behind their viewers’ interests and sense of humor. For example, with *The Office*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, and *The Good Place*, which are all rather recent programs, NBC got rid of the live audience and the laugh effects and started using single-camera and “unprofessional” zooming techniques which were all new concepts in the 2000s and 2010s that viewers resonated with. *Saturday Night Live* also kept renewing their sketches according to popular comedic settings that were “in” at the time and adjusted their musical guests in coordination with popular culture. *The Tonight Show*, although changed presenters over the years, never lost stability and added new sections to the show that reflected pop culture at the time as well. NBC’s openness and accepting attitude towards new techniques and experimenting were essentially the massively successful strategy that helped them to never lose reputation in terms of comedy. NBC took a risk every time something new had approached the comedy scene in the US by implementing it in their sitcoms while other networks were hesitant to do so. Fortunately, NBC’s brave approach to renovation benefited

them over the years, to say the least, and was the biggest reason why and how they became the blueprint and pillar of American television's modern comedy.

<https://www.nbcuniversal.com/history>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Broadcasting-Co-Inc>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Saturday-Night-Live>