



BBC

The season premiere of the BBC show "Doctor Who," involving an astronaut in 1969, is Saturday.

New Time Warp for 'Doctor Who'

By **BRIAN STELTER**

The namesake character in "Doctor Who" can travel through time and space, but he cannot outrun the Internet.

When new episodes of that long-running BBC science-fiction drama were broadcast in Britain last year, executives at the BBC America cable channel observed a major spike in illegal file sharing of the show in the United States. Some stateside fans, it seemed, were unwilling to wait the two weeks between the British and American premieres. Many other "Who" fans who did wait were frustrated by online spoilers on blogs and Twitter.

The BBC's solution is to compress time and space. Taking a page from the same-day worldwide premieres of blockbuster films, the new season of "Doc-

tor Who" will start on Saturday not just in Britain, but in the United States and Canada too.

"Frankly, there are compelling reasons to do it more quickly," said Perry Simon, the general manager for channels at BBC Worldwide America, citing an opportunity to make the telecasts feel like worldwide events for fans. But the main reason relates to online piracy.

"The moment it airs in the U.K., it's open season for pirates around the world," Mr. Simon said. "It's the dark side of living in a global media village."

The simultaneous broadcast date is a boon to American audiences, who have typically waited months or even years for British series to be shown in the United States. Other television networks are also rethinking their release strategies to address

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both the potential for the stealing of shows and the potential for spoilers.

AMC arranged for its international partner to start the first season of "The Walking Dead" in dozens of countries almost simultaneously last fall. Executives there said such a premiere was unprecedented.

"I think you'll see a lot more of that," Gale Anne Hurd, an executive producer of "The Walking Dead," said at the National Association of Broadcasters conference in Las Vegas last week.

Like Mr. Simon, she cited piracy as a primary reason. "While I think fans very much want to do the right thing," she said, "they're not going to wait months and months and months for something that they're that eager to watch."

Like "The Walking Dead," "Doctor Who" has a fervent base of fans, many of whom write about each episode on Twitter and other social networking Web sites. At the Las Vegas conference, Chloe Sladden, the director of media partnerships at Twitter, cited the "Doctor Who" release-date strategy as an example of social media's possibly affecting programming decisions.

That's because the Internet overcomes time-zone borders. Twitter data in the United States indicates that there are fewer tweets about the West Coast broadcasts of television shows than about East Coast broadcasts.

Population differences aside, a



Matt Smith is the current Doctor in BBC's "Doctor Who."

To fight Web piracy, BBC America won't delay a series.

theory postulated by Twitter is that people are less interested in chatting online about a show when they know that the same chat has already occurred three hours earlier. Twitter, Ms. Sladden said in an e-mail, emphasizes "one shared experience."

Mr. Simon said the so-called online water-cooler trend contributed to the decision to speed up the "Doctor Who" telecasts. While they will not happen at the same hour in each country, they

will at least happen on the same day. "There's a tremendous amount of social media interest in all of our programming, particularly 'Doctor Who,' and we want to tap into all of that," he said.

In the first episode of the new season, the sixth since the franchise was restarted in 2005, the Doctor zips to the United States for the first time — another reason BBC America executives were keen to compress the scheduling. Steven Moffat, who took over as the lead writer and executive producer of "Doctor Who" about a year and a half ago, said the characters also wound up on a 17th-century pirate ship and on an asteroid in coming episodes.

The BBC is splitting up the 13-episode season into two halves, with the first ending in June, and the second picking up in the fall.

By then, the bicontinental schedule will have been interrupted by an American holiday. BBC America is running old episodes of "Doctor Who" on Memorial Day weekend — because television viewing levels are generally low that weekend — so the June episodes will be a week behind Britain.

Mr. Simon said BBC America was working on "collapsing" the window of time between local and global premieres of other shows too. Episodes of "The Graham Norton Show" are now shown in the United States only a week after they are in Britain.

"Piracy continues to be television's dirty little secret," he said. "The bigger the show, the bigger the secret."