

Cable Television

Mr. Wrong Number Walks Plank

The exec who announced that Cable Music Channel had launched with more than 2,300,000 households on line is no longer associated with CMC parent, Turner Broadcasting System.

Nory LeBrun, v.p. of cable sales and marketing for TBS, left his position earlier this week. A company spokesman would not comment on the action.

A few days after the Oct. 26 launch of the music service, LeBrun announced TBS had experienced "the fastest sign-on of any service in cable television history."

On Nov. 7, Turner Broadcasting had to recant after discovery of what was termed a "significant internal error" showed that actual cable homes capable of receiving the music channel numbered only 350,000 at launch.

NCTA's '85 Budget Gets Stamp Of Approval

Washington, Nov. 27.

The board of directors of the National Cable Television Assn. has approved a budget of \$6,700,000 for 1985, up from \$6,400,000 this year.

The new budget was approved by the board last week at a meeting in LaQuinta, Cal., a gathering in which it also ordered a special assessment of its members to cover special costs incurred while fighting for the cable deregulation bill. Members are being asked to ante 20% of their 1984 dues, payable this year.

In another move, the board agreed to establish an ACE Academy to encourage broader participation of its annual Awards for Cable Excellence. Non-members, such as independent producers and performers, will be able to join the academy which will raise the profile of the awards.

The board also approved a resolution to endorse the Cable Pioneers Museum and Archives to be established at Pennsylvania State U. The NCTA chairman will serve ex-officio as a member of the museum's board of directors.

Turner To Air Anti-Nukers

Hollywood, Nov. 27.

Ted Turner will utilize two of his cable networks in January for nearly five hours of programming on the threat of nuclear war.

Citing his "intention to increase the public's consciousness about the potential dangers of nuclear proliferation," Turner will present "Threads" — which generated considerable public reaction when aired by the BBC last September — and the British "On The 8th Day" documentary. Both will air on WTBS, with the latter followed by a lengthy panel discussion to be simulcast on both WTBS and the Cable News Network.

Initial telecasts are scheduled for Jan. 13 and 14, 10 days after the new Congress convenes and one week before the second inauguration of President Reagan. All of the programs will be repeated on WTBS twice during the remainder of January.

Dirty Tricks In D.C. Franchise Decision?

Washington, Nov. 27.

One of the two losing bidders for the cable-tv franchise here has filed a \$41,900,000 suit in D.C. Federal Court against franchise winner District Cablevision, Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, city council and the D.C. Cable Design Commission.

Capital City Cable alleges that the telephone company, which will play a key role in the new D.C. cable system, illegally conspired with D.C. officials in helping District Cablevision win the award. Ten-count complaint said the franchise winner and city lawmakers "conspired to eliminate competitors by providing preferential treatment to the application and proposal by District Cablevision and effectively eliminating meaningful consideration of Capital City Cable."

Comcast & Rollins Land Philly Franchises

Philadelphia, Nov. 27.

City Council has awarded the last two of four cable tv franchises to Comcast Cablevision of Philadelphia and to Rollins Cablevision of Philadelphia one week after recommending Greater Philadelphia Cablevision and Wade Communications. Mayor W. Wilson Goode has signed the necessary ordinances.

Comcast, already ensconced in Philadelphia suburbs, was unanimously awarded Area 4 (northeast Philadelphia). Rollins landed Area 3 (parts of north and northwest Philadelphia) on a 12-3 vote.

Greater Philadelphia has Area 1 (center city and south Philadelphia) and Wade Area 2 (parts of west and northwest Philadelphia).

Negotiations on contract specifics will continue during the next six months. Some service is expected by the end of next year, full service by 1988. Proposed monthly fees range from \$2.50 for 36 channels to \$5.95 for 65 channels.

German's Dismayed By Cable Hookup Count

Ludwigshafen, Nov. 27.

Anstalt fuer Kabelkommunikation (AKK), Germany's first cable-tv operator, will be a year old Jan. 1, and has just come out with a detailed report.

The first three years of the cable operation are labeled a "test phase," and station execs claim that with future links to the satellite for new tv programs coming and with a new private radio program, the number of subscribers will increase.

Right now — to the dismay of everyone linked with the cable scene in West Germany — only about 7,500 homes have paid for the cable use.

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HBO Ratings In A Slump, While USA & CNN Excel

Hollywood, Nov. 27.

Home Box Office continued to struggle, while Cable News Network and USA Network excelled and most other services finished with mixed results in October Nielsen ratings for the cable services.

HBO suffered another round of sharp dropoffs, as the payable service saw its primetime rating drop 18% compared to October 1983's, and its 7 a.m.-to-1 a.m. score slip by 15%. The primetime tally was HBO's second lowest since the spring of 1982, a 29-month span.

Cable News Network, apparently benefiting from Presidential-debate and pre-election news interest, streaked to its highest primetime rating in 21 months (since January 1983), and equalled its best 6 a.m.-to-2 a.m. rating since last March.

And USA Network continued its string of impressive year-to-year gains by equalling the highest prime and 7 a.m.-to-1 a.m. scores of the past five months.

Most other services had mixed results or figures close to what had been reported in recent months.

WTBS finished with its first year-to-year increase in primetime ratings since June, but that figure was also the station's lowest rating since March. Christian Broadcasting Network's CBN service equalled its worst primetime rating in the last 15 months, but also matched its best 7 a.m.-1 a.m. finish in six months. And CNN Headline News, Lifetime and Nashville Network all approximately equalled results reported throughout last Summer.

The Standings

The October 7 a.m.-to-1 a.m. standings among ad-supported services (figured against only the homes that receive the service being measured) are: 1. WTBS, a 2.3 rating (down 4%); 2. USA Cable Network, 1.1 (up 57%); 3. CBN, 1.0 (up 11%); 4. CNN, 0.8 (6 a.m. to 2 a.m.; up 14%); 5. Nashville Network, 0.5 (9 a.m. to 3 a.m., not measured last year); 6. CNN Headline News, 0.4 (6 a.m. to 2 a.m., not measured last year); 7. Lifetime, 0.3 (not measured last year).

Three services are measured only quarterly. Third-quarter results for those services were: 1. MTV, 1.0 (24 hours, down 17% compared to all released '83 ratings); 2. ESPN, 0.7 (down 13%); 3. Nickelodeon, 0.6 (7 a.m. to 9 p.m., not measured last year).

The 10 highest rated October programs on ad-supported services, as compiled by Turner Broadcasting System, were: 1. "Pro Wrestling," USA Network (a 5.2 rating); 2. "Academy Award Theatre," WTBS (5.0); 3. college football, ESPN (4.4); 4. "Sunday Sports," WTBS (4.3); 5. "Wagon Train," CBN, and "Andy Griffith," WTBS (both with 4.1); 7. "World Championship Sports," WTBS, and "Cousteau," WTBS (both with 4.0); 9. "Good News," WTBS

Hunter From The Future" (12.5/17), 10. "Revenge Of The Ninja" (12.3/21).

HBO's overall primetime rating was an 8.1 (down 18%) and its 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. rating was a 4.1 (down 15%).

Among the measured services, the penetration rates are: 1. ESPN, 40% of the country's tv homes; 2. WTBS, 39%; 3. CNN, 36%; 4.

CBN and USA, 32% each; 6. MTV, 28%; 7. Nickelodeon, 26%; 8. Lifetime, 24%; 9. Nashville Network, 23%; 10. CNNHN, 17%.

October primetime standings were: 1. WTBS, 3.0 (up 15%); 2. USA, 1.6 (up 60%); 3. CNN, 1.1 (up 38%); 4. CBN, 1.0 (down 17%); 5. Nashville Network, 0.8 (not measured last year); 6. Lifetime, 0.4 (not measured last year).

Brits All Fired Up Over Blurbs; Chances For Cable TV Ads Iffy

By BERT BAKER

London, Nov. 27.

The road to openly sponsored programming on U.K. payable, which is permissible under the newly adopted cable-tv laws, is not only long but littered with obstacles. And the possibility of such sponsorship on the terrestrial networks here seems even more remote.

This much became clear at a two-day gabfest in London last week, attended by reps from U.K. payable, the BBC and independent tv, independent program makers and ad agencies, with several visitors from the U.S. and the Continent on the panels.

Raucous Lobby

The lobby for commercial tv is becoming increasingly raucous, and the meet occurred at a time when the BBC is calling for an increased license fee on color tv sets, and in the context of growing pressure on the BBC to air commercial spots to supplement its income.

At present there is what one speaker described as "creeping sponsorship" on both BBC and independent tv. On BBC-TV, sponsored (commercial) events carry the sponsor's name, which is also mentioned during the program, and in televised soccer player's shirts bear the sponsor's logo.

Indie tv has recently lifted the prohibition on sponsors' blurbs being aired before, during and after a sponsored event, and the sponsors' logo can now be listed with the credits.

Future On Payable

The market for sponsored programs on Britain's fledgling payable system is miniscule. Adam Singer, of the premium TEN film channel, estimated a total of 100,000 payable subscribers by the end of the year, and possibly 300,000 within the next two years.

The response of some speakers at the talk-in was to stress the presence of a rapidly expanding European cable-tv market; some said cable tv in the U.K. could not survive without sponsored programming targeted at the whole European market.

Although the debate at this stage is somewhat academic, there were distinct divisions on how sponsored tv should be handled. At the conference, organized by MacFarlane Conferences and sponsored by CJT Research, the cable operators wanted total control of sponsored program content, but the ad agencies wanted not only total editorial say but the right to make programs in their entirety.

Meantime, Roy Lockett, deputy leader of the technicians' union, said he was already alarmed at the degree of "surreptitious sponsorship" in broadcast tv, and claimed that opening up the medium to major corporations would make the industry "hostage to sponsorship."

Nazi Trial On TV?

Paris, Nov. 27.

Justice Minister Robert Badinter, weighing the introduction of tv cameras to record criminal court cases, personally evaluated the effects of lighting last week at Paris' main Cour d'Assises chamber.

Badinter, a former top criminal lawyer, sat in the places of judge, jury, prosecutor and defendant as cameramen of the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel conducted tests.

By French tradition, not even stenographic transcripts or audio recordings are made at criminal trials. But a poll has showed 70% of the French favorable to televising the trial of Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie, known as the "butcher of Lyons."

Lensing tests next will be made at Lyons' courthouse, where Barbie will be tried. Trial date for Barbie, who was extradited some time ago from Bolivia, has not been set.

German Cabler Starts Pic Channel

Ludwigshafen, Nov. 27.

"Movie Channel 1" (MC-1) will start airing feature films daily on Dec. 1 over the Ludwigshafen cable pilot project, the group announced here.

Wolfgang Theile, speaking for MC-1 shareholders; producers Arthur Brauner and Jürgen Wolhrabe, both from West Berlin; Telespot (commercials) topper Walter Klement, Bonn, and Dieter Spickert, a Ludwigshafen theater owner, said the group was also applying for licenses in Munich, Berlin and Lower Saxony, the first of the 11 länder (states) to approve commercial radio and television.

Theile said the group jointly held rights to about 500 feature films, including 300 alone from Brauner. MC-1 will show some 20 feature pics monthly, with frequent repetitions.

Between showings, MC-1 will also air reports from principal production centers of the world's film industry.

MC-1 will work closely with Kle-Telespot in the commercial

industry. It is expected that because of the involvement in the project, the group is considering possible cooperation with inter-

national cable subscribers in about 1,000 projects are planned for next year in the region.