

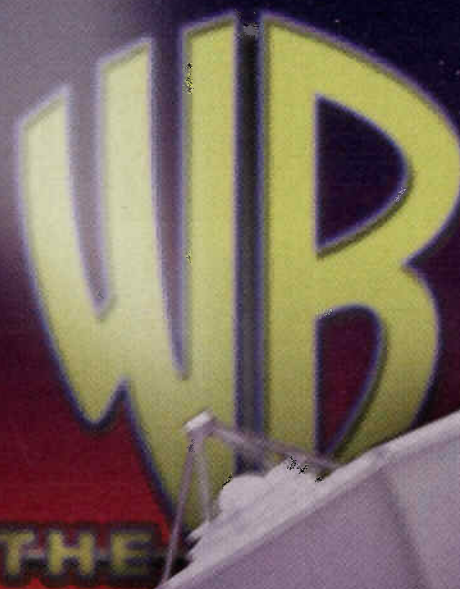
TVweek.com

TelevisionWeek

SPECIAL ISSUE

INCORPORATING ELECTRONIC MEDIA

\$3.50 SEPTEMBER 22, 2003

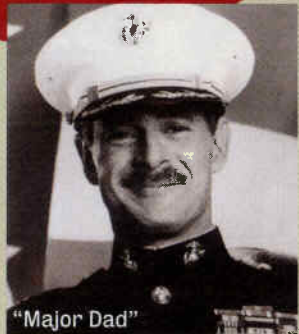


**A Salute to The WB 100+
Station Group on its
Fifth Anniversary, Page 13**

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NEWSPAPER

Illustration by Andy Crittenden

THE WB 100+



"Major Dad"

SMALL MARKETS ADD UP

WB 100+ a Force in Programming

By Chris Pursell

When a potential buyer can offer more households than the nation's top market, syndicators are going to pay attention.

The formation of The WB 100+ Station Group, has made one-stop station shopping a reality for syndicators in 109 of the nation's 111 smallest markets, reaching more than 9.18 million households (vs. more than 7 million in New York). It has also meant the stations have been able to tailor a full-day programming lineup of young-skewing syndicated shows group-wide that are



"QUINCY, M.E." Off-net fare was an early hallmark of The WB 100+.

consistent with The WB Network's image.

Of course, it took five years to get there.

In September 1998, when the group debuted, blocks of time were filled with off-net syndie fare such as "Quincy, M.E." and "Major Dad." However, Lynn Stephanian, senior VP of programming and production for the outlet, said the mantra from the start was to fill time slots with as much first-run product as possible.

"We acquire what fits
continued on page 22



Forging an Identity

Innovative Strategy by The WB Helps Build a National Footprint

By Kathleen O'Steen
Special to TelevisionWeek

Five years ago, a group of executives at Warner Bros. made television history.

With fledgling network The WB in hand and a lack of Federal Communications Commission licenses to take it nationwide, they chose to do the near impossible: create a new television station group via a complex and nearly unheard-of arrangement between cable operators and over-the-air station affiliates. The result was The WB 100+ Station Group, which launched in September 1998 with 80 stations and 2.8 million households—all in small and midsize TV markets—marking the largest station launch ever.

The challenges the WB 100+ Station Group now faces, such as competition from satellite and finding ways to customize local lineups, pale in comparison with the hurdles it already has cleared. The group hasn't had time to look back on its first

five years, when it grew to 109 stations reaching more than 9 million households. It has taken off in large part due to a successful lineup of programming that includes The WB's "Angel," "Charmed," "Gilmore Girls" and "Everwood" in prime time and syndicated fare such as "Friends," "Will & Grace" and

Consultancy. "But those skeptics are now eating their words. The WB has really managed to do what networks need to do—have a clear idea of who their audience is, then come up with a lot of high-quality shows aimed at that audience, in this case the audience being Generation X." The WB 100+ Station Group

“There were a lot of skeptics when The WB was introduced. But those skeptics are now eating their words.”

Peter Kreisky, president, Kreisky Media Consultancy

lately "The King of Queens." The station group also carries Kids' WB, which boasts such hot tot cartoons as "Yu-Gi-Oh!" "Jackie Chan Adventures" and "What's New Scooby-Doo?"

"I think there were a lot of skeptics when The WB was introduced," said Peter Kreisky, president of New York-based Kreisky Media

made it possible for The WB to have a national identity, which is crucial to an advertiser-supported network. With some 60 employees and a host of hard-won agreements with cable operators and broadcast affiliates to partner in the endeavor, the group has been nothing short of a surprising upstart.

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TIMELINE

Sept. 21, 1998: The WB 100+ Station Group, a division of The WB Network, launches its first broadcast, making television history with 80 stations signed on. The initial reach is into 2.8 million homes. Prior to its launch, it has struck long-term agreements with TCI and Time Warner Cable for carriage.

June 2001: All the major cable MSOs now carry the 100+ Station Group.

September 2001: The 100+ is available in 7.4 million homes.

May 2003: "7th Heaven" finishes sweeps as the No. 1 show in its time period among women 18 to 34 in



Corpus Christi, Texas, and several other markets. "Reba" is No. 1 in the demo in Springfield, Mass., and other markets.

September 2003: The 100+ celebrates its fifth anniversary with a reach of more than 9.2 million homes. It's available in 43 states via 109 stations. It has 51 broadcast partners, three radio partners and nine sales agencies. Many of the partners cover more than one market.

—KATHLEEN O'STEEN

The WB's Radical Genesis

Kellner Had an Idea to Build a Network With Cable Links and Broadcast Trappings

By Kathleen O'Steen
Special to *TelevisionWeek*

It seemed an impossible answer to an insoluble problem.

When The WB television network launched in January 1995, few in the entertainment industry were placing bets that the fledgling network would last.

The joint venture between Warner Bros., Tribune Broadcasting and Jamie Kellner—the man who helped build the Fox network back in the late 1980s—was faced with a lot of problems. Possibly the largest was its lack of distribution.

While it had pieced together a number of affiliates in the major markets, thanks in large part to Tribune Broadcasting, the fact was it could not achieve nationwide distribution, a fact that would sorely hamper ad sales. There just weren't enough licenses available from the Federal Communications Commission in many of the country's smaller markets to start up yet another



Jamie Kellner

events—and run the network out of Los Angeles.

Pie in the Sky

It was pie-in-the-sky meandering at first; the technology just wasn't available to make it a reality. That began to change rapidly with the advent of digital video disc technology that Warner Bros. co-created, followed by MPEG II, a format by which film and video could be transmitted as data.

"At that point, Warner Bros. technology got together with IBM and created a wireless, satellite-fed cable box that could have 50, 100 or 150 different cable head-ends," said Russell Myerson, executive VP and general manager of the WB 100+ Station Group.

In other words, the boxes—located in over-the-air TV stations and cable offices around the country—could not only receive the transmissions for the WB network but also disseminate which ads were to run in which markets, which call letters

were to go with which city and so on.

"The technology was brilliant," said Jed Petrick, president and chief operating officer for The WB. "From his days at Fox, Jamie Kellner knew he needed to have distribution in the country's smaller cities. And he came up with a plan that brought together five disparate parts of the industry, and everyone won."

Those five fingers included cable operators, who were being handed another channel that skewed toward a younger view-

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“[Jamie Kellner] came up with a plan that brought together five disparate parts of the industry, and everyone won.”

Jed Petrick, president and COO, The WB

network (Fox had already forged this trail a decade earlier, taking up the fourth and often final FCC license in these markets.).

Mr. Kellner devised a plan that, at its start, seemed unthinkable. Build a nationwide network that would unite cable operators and over-the-air TV affiliates in one common goal: providing a nationwide platform for The WB channel. Design the channel to look like a local station in each market—including local call letters, local advertising and on-air promotion of local

The WB 100+



HITTING ITS NICHE The WB 100+ Station Group has a syndie lineup designed to appeal to the 12 to 34 audience, which watches such prime-time shows on The WB as "Angel."

FORGING

The group in effect convinced archrivals—the broadcasters and cable companies who to this day remain at odds in a battle for viewers' attention—to become partners.

"Technology was our first obstacle: How do we get this from point A to point B?" said Russell Myerson, executive VP and general manager, WB 100+ Station Group. "Once we had that figured out, we had to convince the television stations to think of this as a duopoly. We had to convince them and the cable companies that it could work as a three-way partnership. It had to be a financial package that made it worthwhile for both of them while it helped us achieve our distribution goal."

The WB 100+ Station Group has been enough of a success that when syndicators are looking to put their shows out there, they aren't hesitant to consider being on the group, said Bill



'ALL ABOUT THE ANDERSONS' The series, one of The WB's new prime-time shows, airs Fridays.

Carroll, VP and director of programming at the Katz Television Group, a media representative that sells spot advertising on radio and television stations across the United States. "The people who run it and put together the schedule have been aggressive in putting together a product that enhances its niche audience [12 to 34]," Mr. Carroll said.

As the station group continues to flesh out its programming choices—this fall The WB is introducing several new shows in prime time, including "Tarzan," "All About the Andersons" and "Steve Harvey's Big Time"—100+ executives are most enthused about the new

continued from page 13

daytime lineup. Such shows as "Ricki Lake," "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" and "The Sharon Osbourne Show" may finally help them break a hit in the elusive afternoon daypart.

"Most of the daytime franchises either don't hit our demos or are already taken up," said Russell Myerson, executive VP and general manager of the 100+ Station Group. "Daytime is a tough market, but we think we've got a great lineup."

Flexible Future

The company is looking down the road toward the advent of new technology that will further enhance its business.

"We expect three years from now that the next generation of technology will be high-definition," Mr. Myerson said. "That and the advent of other technological advances will allow us to further customize programming schedules in each of our markets."

The WB, unlike its competitors in the syndication market, has one time schedule for all of its shows. In the future, executives are looking toward new technology that will allow them to tweak the schedule in any given region.

Take "The Bernie Mac Show" as an example. The station group has picked up the show's off-network syndication rights and will start airing the comedy series in fall 2005. Executives at the 100+ Station Group said they would choose to schedule the show in different time slots, depending on the market, if they had the technology to do so.

"In the more ethnically diverse markets, we might put that show in a higher prime-time slot," Mr. Myerson said.

As things now stand, the network's schedule has to remain

the same throughout the country. Only the advertising, station identifications and local promotions differ from one city to the next.

And as 100+ executives look toward strengthening their position as a national network, they can't help but admit to a growing concern—the ongoing war between cable and satellite TV operators. As satellite television continues to make inroads into the cable domain, it remains a question which medium will be dominant.

At this point, generally 30 percent of the population in any 100+ market does not see The WB because those households don't subscribe to cable.

"It's absolutely a worry, but the cable industry has been

terrific," Mr. Myerson said. "Part of the way we sold this venture was to give cable exclusivity."

Mr. Myerson said that one day the company may have to rethink whether to include satellite if the balance between cable and satellite dramatically alters.

However, Jed Petrick, president and chief operating officer of The WB, said he's confident cable will remain dominant.

"We made a deal with cable operators that enabled us to get where we are today. We wouldn't be here without that," he said. "As we move toward high-definition, I just think that cable is going to be the one that will be able to take down that digital feed. Satellite just doesn't have the bandwidth. They need to figure out how to squeeze more out of the lemon." ■



BERNIE MAC The WB 100+ group has picked up the off-net syndie rights to "Bernie Mac Show."

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Proudly Congratulates

The WB 100+ Station Group

On Their 5 Year Anniversary



PROFILE: RUSSELL MYERSON

From Kit to Cable

Station Group Leader Transformed Childhood Fascination into Career

By **Jennifer Pendleton**
Special to TelevisionWeek

As a schoolboy in St. Petersburg, Fla., Russell Myerson purchased a kit from RadioShack full of components to build a rudimentary radio transmitter. After he assembled the transmitter Mr. Myerson became a disc jockey, spinning top 40 records for his family to hear on the radio at home. Soon his ambitions mushroomed: What if he plugged that same equipment into the clothesline? You guessed it. Mr. Myerson found a way to jigger the wires so he could transmit his musical program to the neighborhood.

There were other indications that Mr. Myerson possessed

more than a childhood interest in broadcasting. Each summer, on visits to New York with his physician father, homemaker mother and two siblings, the teenage Mr. Myerson took in the NBC tour at Rockefeller Center. Fascinated, he started reading television industry trade publications. Eventually the precocious lad could outwit NBC's tour guides, pointing out errors in their presentations.

Today, after more than 20 years in broadcasting and cable, Mr. Myerson still believes in pushing the limits of existing technology to achieve professional goals and remains a walking encyclopedia of television (though he no longer has the inclination to point out flaws in network tours). He's executive VP and general manager of The WB's 100+ Station Group, the cable-delivered entity affiliated with the youth-skewing network.

It's a job the now 48-year-old Mr. Myerson took six years ago. At the time, The WB's 100+ Station Group was a figment of WB chief Jamie Kellner's imagination. Despite a shortage of available stations in broadcast markets ranked 100 to 210, a determined Mr. Kellner believed that somehow, The WB could establish itself in America's small to medium communities.

Eventually, a solution would emerge by way of then-new technology capable of delivering The WB (and elements of local broadcast) through cable pipes. But in 1997, when Mr. Myerson arrived, such technology didn't exist. The WB also hadn't yet set up the elaborate web of relationships with technology companies, local stations and cable operators necessary to fulfill its dreams.

"Jamie Kellner gives you the concept, and you do what you need to do and get it done," Mr. Myerson said, summarizing his 1997 marching orders. But he conceded, "It was a challenge at every level. ... We were doing something that had never been done before."

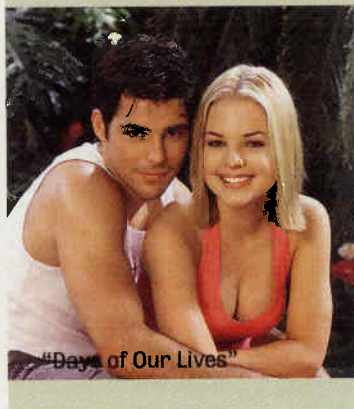
Mr. Myerson possessed a rare



100+ STATION GROUP CHIEF Russell Myerson has always tried to push the limits of technology.

STATS

Name: Russell H. Myerson
Date of Birth: Sept. 16, 1955
Birthplace: St. Petersburg, Fla.
Start date at The WB 100+ Station Group: Aug. 1, 1997
Who knew? Mr. Myerson has been an ardent fan of the long-running NBC soap opera "Days of Our Lives" since the 1960s. Yes, of course, the executive has a packed schedule, so he doesn't have the luxury of tuning in to observe those "sands through the hourglass" every day. But that's what TiVo and ReplayTV are for, said Mr. Myerson, who screens his favorite soap in the evening and on weekends, as time allows.



"Days of Our Lives"

combination of cable and broadcast experience, plus an entrepreneur's zeal for risk taking and dedication to hard work. Mr. Myerson had been senior VP of operations for Sony Pictures Entertainment's cable Game Show Network during its start-

La., put Mr. Myerson's enthusiasm for regional cuisine to use, making him on-air cooking segment host.

His dedication led to positions in larger markets and eventually his relocation to the West Coast with Sony. Today

a five-frame mural depicting the medium's classic characters, including Lucille Ball, Howdy Doody and Roseanne Barr; it's modest in size, by Hollywood standards. He arrives each day at 6:15 a.m., fielding calls to and from the hundreds of executives in his coast-to-coast enterprise.

At his level, Mr. Myerson is surprisingly hands-on, spending around half of his time on the road. Vic Vettes, general manager of WKTV and WBU-TV in Utica, N.Y., said Mr. Myerson has visited probably five times since 1998. He's participated in sales presentations to local advertisers and broken bread at local Italian restaurants with Mr. Vettes and others.

"It speaks to the passion he has for what he does for a living," Mr. Vettes said of the personal attention he and others receive.

That it does, for Mr. Myerson still claims to hold an unabashed love of the business, despite the loneliness of frequent travel and little free time. "My hobby is also my profession," he said. "Most of my weekends are spent watching television." ■

"[Establishing the WB 100+ Station Group] was a challenge at every level ... We were doing something that had never been done before."

Russell Myerson, executive VP and general manager, The WB 100+ Station Group

up phase, creating Sony's first all-digital television facility in the United States in 1994 (Liberty Media is now Sony's partner on GSN). Before that he'd held production and scheduling jobs at small television stations, one so strapped Mr. Myerson would pinch hit as set painter, on-air reporter and live telethon producer. KPLC-TV in Lake Charles,

under Mr. Myerson's leadership, the WB 100+ Station Group has 109 stations around the country, reaching 9 million households. He oversees a staff of 60 at headquarters in Burbank, Calif., near the Warner Bros. back lot. "I want people who are self-starters," he said.

Mr. Myerson runs his operation in an office decorated with

Courtesy of The WB 100+ Station Group/Andy Citteridan

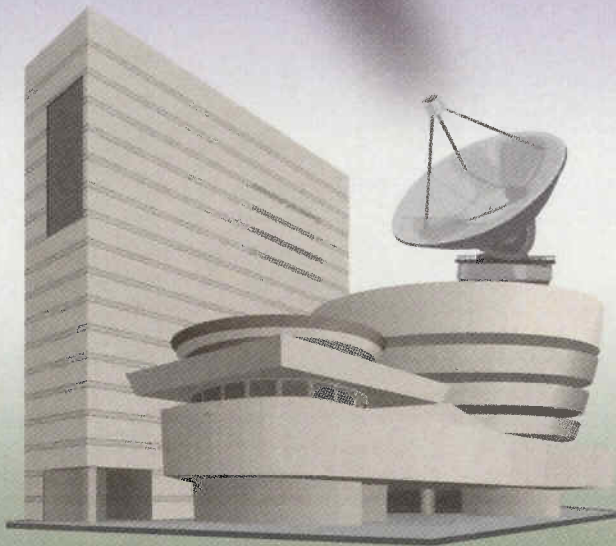
HOW IT WORKS**THE WB 100+ STATION GROUP
UTILIZES THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY
TO DELIVER THE WB****WB Digital Uplink**
transmits digitized local spots, promos, playlists and programming**Station in a Box**

downloads, stores and inserts local spots, promos and playlists

**Local Partner**

promotes WB station, sells time

Local spots sent overnight to Central Site

**WB Central Site**

Digitizes spots, promos & playlists

Tech Wizardry Controls Network

'Station in a Box' Units Transfer Feeds, Pick Up Programming, Call In Problems**Kathleen O'Steen***Special to TelevisionWeek*

It kind of works on the same idea as ATMs.

When Jamie Kellner came up with a plan to distribute The WB Network via a string of cable operators and broadcasters and give the stations a local identity in each market, he needed the tech guys to make it happen.

"No one had ever done anything like this before," said Chris Cookson, president of Warner Bros. Technical Operations. "At the time, we were working on video compression, developing digital video disc technology."

That research, and the subsequent evolution of MPEG II technology, was crucial in the development of the SIB (station in a box) unit, a box about 5.25 inches high that has a computer brain. Created by Warner Bros.

and IBM, the box, which is located in cable offices and broadcast stations in all 109 station locations, receives a data feed from a satellite—basically file transfers—and that feed is then transmitted via cable to viewers as programming and advertising on The WB. The WB pays for SIB units in each of the stations or cable offices across the country, to the tune of about \$9,000 each, according to Two Blue Rhino founder Nory LeBrun, who helped bring in the cabling.

"It's kind of like e-mail," Mr. Cookson said.

While Warner Bros. and IBM created the initial file transfer management system, Mr. Cookson said, technology has since moved on and later systems are not based on the same hardware content. "This isn't some-

thing that is proprietary in any way," he said, "but we were lucky to be able to realize its usefulness early on."

In addition to receiving the data for the programming, the SIBs also receive data feed for local advertising and local call letters—but each SIB box has its own address and knows when to pick up the local programming or call letter identification for its particular market.

"If we have an ad for a local car dealer in Beaumont, Texas, we send a file on the satellite addressed to the box in Beaumont," Mr. Cookson said. "And only that box captures it and stores it on the hard disk."

Each box also receives a playlist telling it when to air programming, when to insert commercials and so on.

"It's basically mimicking what

a TV station does, but it's just a few inches of hardware sitting at a headend," Mr. Cookson said.

The transmissions are sent from a WB facility near Los Angeles International Airport, and all 109 stations around the country are monitored by employees in Los Angeles. Executives said they can operate the nationwide channel group at 10 percent of the usual cost of running a nationwide station group, and they contend that the system works with very few problems.

"The boxes call in on a regular basis to report what they've been doing," Mr. Cookson said. "If there's a problem, several things can be done to correct it without actually having to travel there."

What if the box forgets to call in? "Then we can tell it to call in," Mr. Cookson said. "And it will listen." ■

WB 100+ AFFILIATES

The following is a complete list of The WB 100+ Station Group affiliates. Listings include city location (DMA) and WB call letters. An asterisk means the station is not currently broadcasting.

Abilene-Sweetwater, Texas, KAWW; Dothan, Ala., WBDO; Lafayette, La., KLWB; Rochester-Mason City-Austin, Iowa, KWBR; Albany, Ga., WBSK; Duluth-Superior, Minn., KWBD; Lake Charles, La., WBLC; Rockford, Ill., WBR; Alexandria, La., KAXN; Elmira, N.Y., WBE; Lansing, Mich., WBL; Salisbury, Md., WBD; Alpena, Minn., WBAE; Erie, Pa., WBEP; Laredo, Texas, KTXW; San Angelo, Texas, KWSA; Amarillo, Texas, KDBA; Eugene, Ore., KZWB; Lima, Ohio, WBOH; Santa Barbara, Calif., KWCA; Anchorage, Alaska, KWBX; Eureka, Calif., KWBT; Lincoln-Hastings-Kearney, Neb., KWBL; Savannah, Ga., WBVH; Augusta, Ga., WBAU; Fairbanks, Alaska, KWFA*; Lubbock, Texas, KWZB; Sherman-Ada, Texas, KSHD; Bakersfield, Calif., KWFB; Fargo-Valley City, N.D., WBFQ; Macon, Ga., WBMN; Sioux City, Iowa, KXWB; Bangor, Maine, WBAN; Florence-Myrtle Beach, S.C., WFVB; Mankato, Minn., KWYE; Sioux Falls, S.D., KWJB; Beaumont-Port Arthur, Texas, KWBB; Fort Smith-Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, Ark., KWFT; Marquette, Mich., WBMM; Springfield-Holyoke, Mass., WBQT; Bend, Ore., KWBO; Fort Wayne, Ind., WBFW; Medford-Klamath Falls, Ore., KMFD; St. Joseph, Mo., WBJO; Billings, Mont., KWBM; Gainesville, Fla., WBFJ; Meridian, Miss., WBMM; Tallahassee-Thomasville, Fla., WBXT; Biloxi-Gulfport, Miss., WBGP; Glendive, Mont., KWZB; Minot-Bismarck-Dickinson, N.D., KWMB; Terre Haute, Ind., WBI; Binghamton, N.Y., WBXI; Grand Junction, Colo., KWGJ; Missoula, Mont., KIDW; Topeka, Kan., WBKS; Bluefield-Beckley-Oak Hill, W.Va., WBB; Great Falls, Mont., KWGF; Monroe-El Dorado, La., KWMB; Traverse City-Cadillac, Mich., WBVC; Boise, Idaho, KWOB; Greenville-New Bern-Washington, N.C., WGWB; Monterey-Salinas, Calif., KMWB; Twin Falls, Idaho, KWTE; Bowling Green, Ky., WBWG; Greenwood-Greenville, Miss., WBWD; Montgomery, Ala., WBMY; Tyler-Longview, Texas, KWTL; Butte-Bozeman, Mont., KWXB; Harlingen-Weslaco-Brownsville-McAllen, Texas, KHWB; North Platte, Neb., KWPL; Utica, N.Y., WBU; Casper-Riverton, Wyo., KWVY; Harrisonburg, Va., WBHA; Odessa-Midland, Texas, KWWT; Victoria, Texas, KWVB; Charleston, S.C., WBLN; Hattiesburg-Laurel, Miss., WBH; Ottumwa-Kirksville, Mo., KWOT; Watertown, N.Y., WBWT; Charlottesville, Va., WBC; Helena, Mont., KWHA; Palm Springs, Calif., KCWB; Wausau-Rhineland, Wis., WBWA; Cheyenne-Scottsbluff, Wyo., KCHW; Idaho Falls-Pocatello,

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Cable, Broadcast Unite

Unusual Arrangement Devised for Fledgling Group Allows L.A.-Run Stations to Maintain Local Look

By Kathleen O'Steen
Special to TelevisionWeek

It was a marriage of two unlikely partners.

When The WB's Jamie Kellner first proposed the game plan in 1998 for a nationwide station group to distribute the channel in small and mid-range markets, the plan called for cable operators and broadcasters to actually work together.

ing firm that works with both broadcasters and cable. "But this arrangement turned out to be so unique that every six months or so the cable operators have to be reminded of how it works."

The WB Network prime-time programming and the syndicated programs that the station group has licensed are distributed via cable to receivers in 109 television markets around

partner in the 100+ markets, usually a traditional network affiliate, often sells ad time for the WB affiliate, although the station group has its own sales staff. The traditional broadcast station promotes the WB channel, and in turn, promos for the broadcaster air on the WB outlet.

Unlike traditional cable programming networks, the cable

for the cable operators and broadcasters? The answer, on the whole, is pretty darn well.

"It's been advantageous for us because we're a CBS affiliate,"

said Joe McNamara, VP of WBNG-TV and WBXI-TV out of Binghamton, N.Y. "CBS generally skews 25-54, but having another channel that skews 18-34 is advantageous. It's been a pretty good cross-promotional tool. It's good for our news production because we're always trying to find those younger demos, so we use The WB to promote our news."

While Mr. McNamara said the agreement does allow for some revenue from ad sales on The WB, it's not a huge windfall. "But we feel the product on the

channel has gotten better and better," he said, "so buyers aren't as hesitant to buy time as they were five years ago."

Cable executive Patty

McCaskill, VP of programming at Cequell III and a former executive at Charter Communications when the 100+ Station Group was launched, said the arrangement has also been of benefit to cable. "We had a lot of customers in these smaller markets who were hearing about programming on The WB. It does-

n't matter that they weren't in major metropolitan areas. They still get TV Guide, they still read People magazine. They wanted the programming and this provided a way for us to give it to them that was mutually beneficial." ■

“Every six months or so, the cable operators have to be reminded of how [the arrangement] works.”

Nory LeBrun, founder, Two Blue Rhino

RUNNING THE SALES TEAMS



AD TOPPERS The WB 100+ Station Group's national sales managers are, Don Davis, left, Jennifer Albright and Kim Wilcox; regional sales managers are Mychal Grenawalt, fourth from left, and Jeff MacDougall.

Perish the thought.

"You know, even to this day, the relationship between broadcasters and cable companies is still a difficult relationship," said Nory LeBrun, founder of Two Blue Rhino, a sales and market-

the country. The programming shows up on a cable channel position in each market. Although the content originates from Los Angeles, it is dressed up to look like a local station for each market. A broadcaster

operators that carry the WB stations pay no carriage fees. In fact, the cable operators and local broadcasters share with The WB in the local channel's advertising revenue.

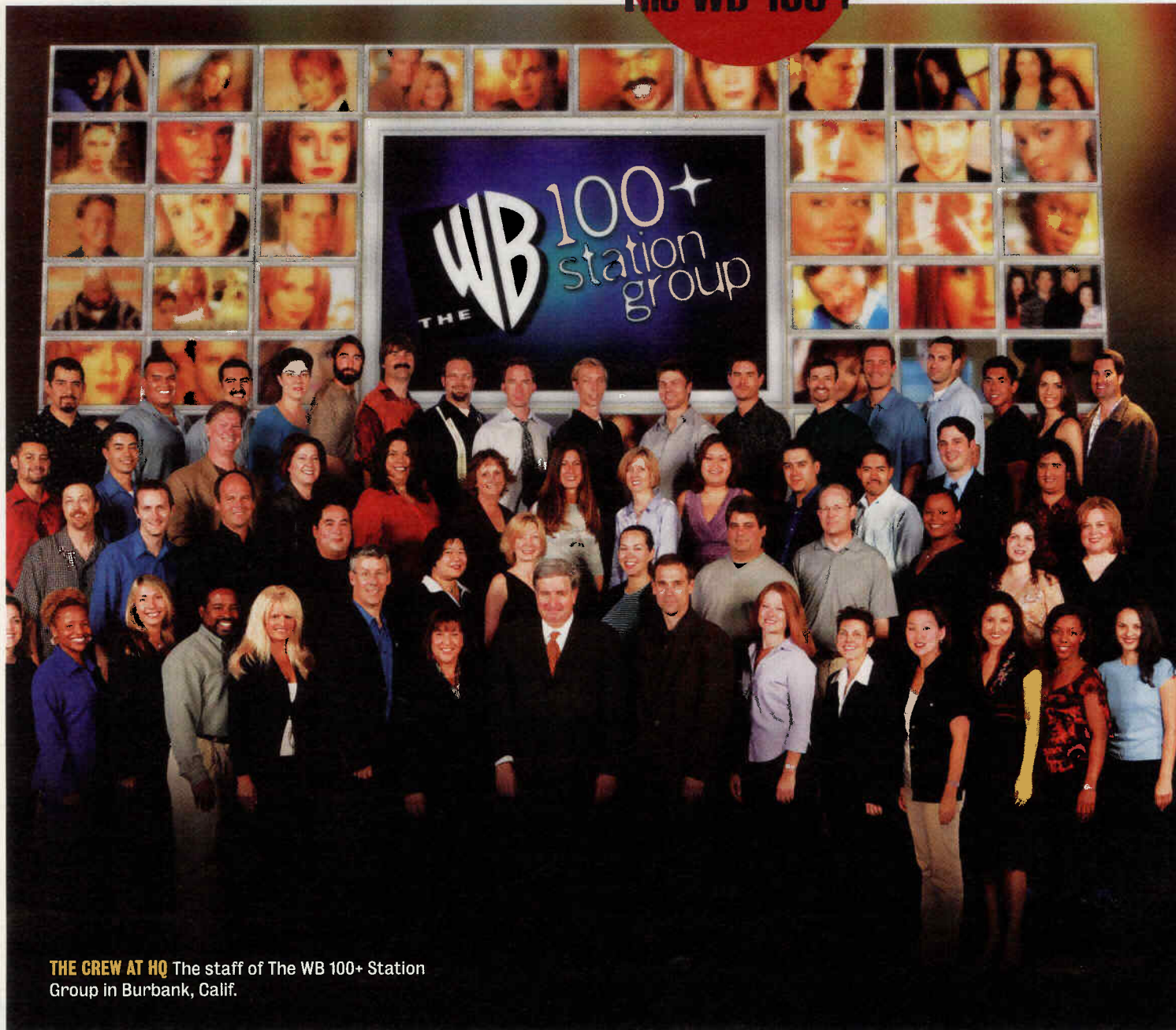
So how has it been working

NEW LINE TELEVISION
Congratulates

THE WB
100+ STATION GROUP
ON THEIR
5TH ANNIVERSARY



NEW LINE TELEVISION
An AOL Time Warner Company
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THE CREW AT HQ The staff of The WB 100+ Station Group in Burbank, Calif.

AFFILS

continued from page 18

Idaho KWIB; Panama City, Fla., WBPC; Wheeling-Steubenville, W.Va., WBWO; Chico-Redding, Calif., KIWB; Jackson, Tenn., WBJK; Parkersburg, W.Va., WBPB; Wichita Falls-Lawton, Texas, KWB; Clarksburg-Weston, W.Va., WVWB; Jonesboro, Ark., KJOS; Peoria-Bloomington, Ill., WBPE; Wilmington, N.C., WBW; Columbia-Jefferson City, Mo., KJWB; Joplin-Pittsburg, Kan., KSXF; Presque Isle, Maine, WBPO; Yuma-Pasco-Richland-Kennewick, Wash., KWYP; Columbus, Ga., WBG; Juneau, Alaska, KWJA; Quincy-Hannibal-Keokuk, Ill., WEWB; Yuma-El Centro, Calif., KWUB; Columbus-Tupelo-West Point, Miss., WBWP; La Crosse-Eau Claire, Wis., WBCZ; Rapid City, S.D., KDUB; Zanesville, Ohio, WBZV; Corpus Christi, Texas, KWDB; Lafayette, Ind., WBFY*; Reno, Nev., KREN. ■

FORGING

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ership; broadcast affiliates, who were looking for ways to access younger viewers; advertisers, who were champing at the bit to sell to younger viewers; syndicators, who now had another national venue for their product; and The WB, which would have a bona fide national platform.

Largest Launch

In September 1998 The WB's 100+ Station Group launched with 80 new stations in TV markets ranked 100 to 210 by Nielsen, marking the largest simultaneous launch of a station group in television history. These were small and midsize markets ranging from Eugene, Ore., to Charleston, S.C., from Binghamton, N.Y., to Redding, Calif., representing about 2.8 million households. They all had one thing in common: No broadcast licenses were avail-

able in their markets, so cable was the only way they could be reached.

The launch was the culmination of an intricate dance, one in which WB executives were able to negotiate distribution agree-

“For our local partners, I like to think that we’ve created a duopoly for them. They have a channel that reaches a prime viewer demo for free.”

Russell Myerson, executive VP and general manager, The WB 100+ Station Group

ments (Mr. Myerson likes to call it “bridge building”) with many of the nation’s cable operators and, simultaneously, bring in local broadcast partners who operated station affiliates around the country. Going into the negotiations, The WB was

able to put something on the table that most affiliates up until then hadn’t been able to—a channel that had a strong 12 to 34 following.

“A lot of these towns are built around universities or military bases,” Mr. Myerson said. “So our demographics worked very well for them.”

The WB 100+ Plus Station Group also offered a tiered advertising sales plan allowing for local, regional and national ads on the channel for everything from the local tattoo parlor to McDonald’s and The Gap. “For our local partners, I like

to think that we’ve created a duopoly for them,” Mr. Myerson said. “They have a channel that reaches a prime viewer demo for free. They get a percentage of the ad revenue and we provide them with the kind of marketing support that they don’t often see from the traditional networks. It’s in everyone’s best interests to see it succeed.”

Since its launch five years ago, the 100+ Station Group’s viewership has steadily grown, from an initial 2.8 million households to more than 9 million today. A big part of that growth can be chalked up to the success of the WB’s programs, with such shows as “Everwood,” “Gilmore Girls” and “Smallville” finding a solid audience base. It also comes from a keen attention to detail in the company’s Burbank, Calif., headquarters. A staff of about 60 employees manages the 109 stations around the country.

Local Focus

One of The WB’s main goals is to make each channel not look like it’s coming from Burbank. That was, after all, part of the original plan—provide each station with its own call letters, its own unique brand.

“Whenever you look at viewership, you find that people tend to favor their local television stations because of that station’s connectivity with the community,” Mr. Myerson said.

In its efforts to make each channel look local, the WB 100+ Station Group does on-air promotions for community events, local public service announcements. It has even been known to promote events at local high schools.

“When tornadoes ripped through Jackson, Tenn. [in May], it devastated the Pringles [potato chip] factory, which is one of the town’s big employers,” Mr. Myerson said. “So we created a spot for that market to make

donations to the Red Cross to help the victims of the tornadoes.

“A number of major plants closed in St. Joseph, Mo., so we ran a [public service announcement] on all 109 of our stations, saying

what a great place St. Joseph was to live and work in. We try to be relevant and to give back to community. I like to think we’re doing things a bit differently. We just try to figure out ways to touch people that others haven’t thought of before.” ■

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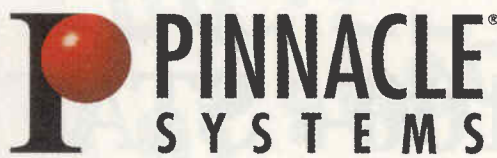
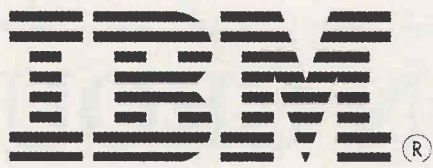
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'KING OF QUEENS' An off-network addition this season to The WB 100+ Station Group's syndie lineup, along with "Ripley's Believe It or Not."

MARKETS

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with our demo," Ms. Stephanian said, "and that works for syndicators because we offer one-stop shopping that will not get pre-empted by news or sports. They know that when we put a show on the air, we take care of it because we give programming the right environment to flourish and a promotional push that's effective."

For syndicators, a sale to The WB 100+ presents an unusual opportunity that allows their shows to be run in the same

time slot across the country. While this has prevented some distributors from making a sale to the group because they were uncomfortable with the available time slots, others are quick to note the upside of maintaining those relationships and selling to the group.

Broad Reach

Some point to the benefits of the younger demographic flow maintained by the group; others note that the national marketing campaign created by The WB 100+ stations is an efficient way to reach broad audiences.

New this year on the sched-

ule are "The Sharon Osbourne Show" and "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" in first run and "The King of Queens" and "Ripley's Believe It or Not" in off-net airings. On the weekends, the group has added "The West Wing" and "Angel."

"In keeping with the demo delivery, we felt that by keeping 'Ricki Lake' at 9 a.m. then moving toward 'Sharon' at 10 and 'Ellen' at 11, we've created a very strong, cohesive line up that allows audience flow throughout the morning" Ms. Stephanian said.

Analysts point to the evolving lineup for the group's 109 markets as a textbook case of defining a network brand.

"Each time they have made an acquisition, they have done so in a way that more clearly defines their complementary nature to the WB prime-time lineup," said Bill Carroll, VP and director of programming at Katz Television Group. "When they first started, they needed to quickly acquire product from whatever was available in the marketplace. Now they can look at what are

the best options to maintain the WB image, and they pursue those shows to add to their image."

From "Sharon" and "Ellen" to "Eliminate" and "Celebrity Justice," the vertically integrated station group has made use of its resources from sister company Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution. But Ms. Stephanian insists that the two do business only when it makes sense for the brand.

"We are now doing business with almost every syndicator," she said. "When it

comes to buying from ourselves, we do not take everything our



LYNN STEPHANIAN

company has to offer. Look at the recent pickups of 'King of Queens' and 'Bernie Mac' (for 2005). They come from outside distributors but clearly make sense to be on our lineup. That's one reason relationships are so vital for us to continue being

successful."

"The big reason we keep going back to Lynn is that at the end of the day, you want to do business with someone you respect and like," said John Weiser, executive VP at Sony Pictures Television. "They work with you throughout the year. It would be easy for them to make a sale and walk away, but they are partners and act like it."

"We think



Ellen DeGeneres

[The WB 100+ Station Group Executive VP and General Manager] Russ [Myerson] and Lynn have done an outstanding job building The WB 100+ into a solid operation," said Paul Frankin, executive VP at Twentieth Television. "We are pleased to have become a partner with them on various programs, including our most recent deal for 'The Bernie Mac Show' in fall '05." ■



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station
group

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