

## The world according to HBO

Home Box Office Inc. has launched an "informational campaign" this month to explain to owners of backyard earth stations why it is scrambling the satellite feeds of HBO and Cinemax and why it will subsequently charge the dish owners to subscribe to the services.

HBO, which is currently scrambling the feeds part time, announced Oct. 9 that it would scramble them full time beginning Jan. 15. At that time, it said, sufficient home descramblers would be available, allowing dish owners to buy them and subscribe to the services. HBO is using the M/A-Com Videocipher II scrambling system.

"In researching the home TVRO sector, we discovered that many dish owners are confused and misunderstand why we are scrambling our signals," said Bob Caird, vice president, direct broadcast, HBO. "So, in the first step of our marketing plan, we want to set the record straight by clarifying these misconceptions."

For the campaign, Caird said, HBO is sending out press kits to newspaper columnists and reporters, running ads in the various home satellite industry publications that reach the dish owners and airing spots on HBO and Cinemax. Caird wouldn't say how much is being spent on the project, but indicated that, by advertising standards, it is a small amount since the target of the campaign is small and easily reached. Industry estimates put the number of dish owners at around 1 million.

Caird said the campaign would seek to correct at least six misconceptions: 1) that the government owns the satellites that transmit the cable services like HBO and Cinemax; 2) that federal law prohibits scrambling; 3) that movies shown on cable services have already been paid for through box-office receipts; 4) that scrambling "destroys" the satellite signal; 5) that dish owners have paid for programming through taxes or through their purchase of the dishes, and 6) that basic cable services receive all their revenues from advertising and are profitable.

## What's basic, what's not

The Community Antenna Television Association told the FCC it needs a new definition of "basic cable service" in rules allowing the FCC to regulate basic cable rates in the absence of effective competition. The new definition was warranted by the elimination of the must-carry rules by the federal appeals court in Washington last July, it said.

In the effective-competition rule, it said, basic is defined as the tier of service containing "all must-carry broadcast television signals." Given the elimination of the rules, it said, basic should be redefined as "only that core service which can be subject to regulation in noncompetitive cable markets."

The CATA-suggested language: "Basic

cable is the tier of service regularly provided to all subscribers that includes the retransmission of unaltered over-the-air broadcast television signals and the public, educational, and governmental channels, if required by a franchising authority...."

## Coming next year

Home Box Office plans to launch *HBO Showcase '86* early next year as "an innovative new umbrella showcase for original entertainment specials written and produced exclusively for HBO."

Bridget Potter, HBO senior vice president of original programming, called it "a very ex-



Potter

citing and important new project for us" and "an opportunity for HBO to present timely specials that showcase today's most interesting artists throughout the entire entertainment spectrum, in a variety of forms."

She said the specials will be 60 to 90 minutes long. Filming on two has been completed. One with the working title "Nosenko" stars Tommy Lee Jones and is based on the true story of a Russian KGB major who defected to the U.S. in 1963. The other, "Half a Lifetime," stars Keith Carradine, Gary Busey, Nick Mancuso and Saul Rubinek as four middle-class men going through a midlife crisis.

"Nosenko" was written by Stephen Davis, "Half a Lifetime" by Stephen Metcalfe. HBO said writers working on scripts for other *Showcase '86* specials include Bill C. Davis, Ronald Ribman, Pete Hamill, Percy Granger and Leon Tokatyan, and the series will use such directors as Bob Giraldi, Colin Callender, Don Ohlmeyer, Dave Bell and columnist Jack Anderson. Topics being explored for future projects were said to include AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), the first documented case in which delayed stress from the Vietnam war was used as an insanity defense, the New Bedford, Mass., gang rape and the psychological effects of life in a fallout shelter.

## Staying 'Alive'

*Alive and Well* moved into its fifth season on the USA Network with production, cast and format changes. The series, sponsored by Bristol-Myers and produced by DBA Television, made the changes with the start of the new season Sept. 30.

Bonnie Shatsky Hammer, who has been developing pilot projects with Michael Rice Media for commercial syndication, cable and public broadcasting, and who formerly produced the *Good Day* series in Boston and numerous specials, signed on as new supervising producer of the daily hour (Monday-Friday at 2 p.m. NYT and Saturday at 8 a.m.). In addition, host Mike Jerrick is joined now by celebrity co-hosts from week to week (based on availability), and the show has added a live audience which is encouraged to participate in discussion of topical issues dealt with on the program.

Hammer says *Alive and Well* will devote its daily hour to the "health and well-being of women," with subjects that are "controversial, upbeat, serious and above all direct and to the point."

## Cable alert

Capital Cablevision, serving some 51,000 subscribers in New York's Albany county, is joining forces with county, state and private business groups to provide televised support for their "Missing Child/Community Alert Network." The county-wide network, created by Automated Communications Inc. of Schenectady, N.Y., and said to be the first of its kind in the U.S., uses computerized telephone dialing to alert neighbors when police receive reports that a child is missing. The telephone message gives the basic information and description provided by police, and adds: "If you are a Capital Cablevision subscriber, tune to channel 19 and watch for more information." In the meantime, Automated Communications has alerted Capital Cablevision, which presents the details and description—and adds a picture, when available—on channel 19, its 24-hour video text service. Frank Green, Capital Cablevision's director of public affairs, called it "the perfect complement to an excellent existing emergency service, utilizing the advanced technology of cable television for the good of the entire community."

## New York late night

Manhattan Cable TV, New York, has introduced *Overnight TV*, a weekend feature spotlighting "music, art, film, theater and New York nightlife." It is offered Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from midnight to 4 a.m., and its purpose, according to Barry Rosenbaum, vice president for marketing and programming, is "to fill a void in late-night programming and to bring our subscribers information, opinions and trends in music, technology, the arts, some of the most acclaimed motion pictures ever made, as well