

PROGRAMING

TRIBUNE, PARAMOUNT PART COMPANY

Tribune decides to take sales of 'Geraldo' and 'Rivers' in-house

Tribune Entertainment said last week it would not renew its distribution agreement with Paramount Domestic Television to sell its two talk strips *Geraldo* and *Joan Rivers*. Instead, Tribune will sell the two programs itself, as it plans to expand its program development and sales activity in the months ahead.

Those plans, said Tribune Entertainment executive vice president, Donald Hacker, include the launch of two, and possibly three new strips at the NATPE convention in New Orleans in January that would be available for fall 1991.

The new shows include a proposed daily half-hour investigative program, *Now it Can Be Told*, from Geraldo Rivera's production company, Investigative News Group. Rivera will be managing editor and host of the new program. He will also report some of the bigger stories the program tackles, a source close to Rivera said. But most of the stories will be reported by a staff of regular and contributing correspondents. *Now it Can Be Told* is a more ambitious version of a weekly show from Rivera that Tribune considered taking out last year, called *The Investigators*. Last week, Rivera was en route to the Middle East to report on a story that will be used in a selling presentation for the new show, and may also be seen on *Geraldo* the talk show later this season.

Also, Hacker said, Tribune would offer a new late-night strip at NATPE, details to follow. In addition, Tribune is about to test a half-hour version of *Kelly and Gail*, the talk show the company tried to launch last year, on KNBC-TV Los Angeles. If the results are promising, Hacker said, it too would be offered at NATPE.

Kelly and Gail is co-hosted by KNBC-TV anchor Kelly Lange and Gail Parent. The program will be tested starting this week on KNBC-TV at 9 a.m., leading into NBC's talk show hosted by Marcia Warfield.

Speculation on the future of the Tribune-Paramount relationship began last spring when Paramount announced plans to produce and distribute its own talk show a year from now, to be hosted by Maury Povich, the current anchor of



Joan Rivers interviews Donald Trump. Sales of the Rivers and Geraldo Rivera talk shows are being taken in-house by Tribune.

Fox's popular syndication strip, *A Current Affair*.

Paramount has already sold Povich to stations covering more than 40% of the country. Paramount has not focused on renewing *Geraldo* or *Rivers* beyond the current season, said David Sifford, executive vice president, sales and marketing, Tribune Entertainment. Sifford reported he had just renewed *Geraldo* on KCBS-TV Los Angeles, where it airs at 4 p.m. for two more years, through 1992-93 season. "We're just beginning renewals on both shows," he said.

Until two weeks ago, Tribune expected to renew its sales agreement with Paramount. "A lot of people have put this situation in the context of the conflict with *Povich*," said Hacker. "I guess that gave us impetus to make a decision. But it really had more to do with expanding the entertainment side of Tribune. We always anticipated getting into the business."

Currently, Sifford heads a sales staff of seven, spread over four offices (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Nashville). Sifford said he hopes to add five or six new sales people as the company gears up its program development and

distribution effort, and will open two new regional sales offices.

Tribune's decision to take over distribution of its two talk shows was viewed as a positive move by station reps, who cited the obvious conflict Paramount would face selling its own talk show on one hand, and two others that compete for key time periods on station schedules.

Even though fact, *Povich* has cleared more than 40% of the country for fall 1991, Sifford said he was not concerned that renewal efforts for Joan and Geraldo is just beginning for next year. "If they didn't have that 40%, then somebody else would," he said. (Fox was planning its own *Povich* talk show for 1991 before Paramount intervened.)

Hacker said that the company will also take on more of its international selling effort in-house. To date, much of that work has been contracted out on a piecemeal basis, to such companies as Freemantle, Worldvision, and local representatives in various countries.

Paramount is said to have been collecting a 35% gross sales commission for distributing the two shows, or between \$15 million and \$20 million, sources said.

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