

ABC pre-empts CBS in Cleveland, Detroit

Ten-year deal with Scripps Howard appears to be a costly victory

By Geoffrey Foisie

CBS came up short last week in the network scramble for major-market affiliates. Rejecting CBS, Scripps Howard opted for a 10-year affiliation agreement with ABC covering five cities.



Scripps Howard's WEWS Cleveland and WXYZ-TV Detroit will keep their ABC affiliation. And its KNXV-TV Phoenix, WFTS Tampa, Fla., and WMAR-TV Baltimore will join the ABC family.

The Tampa and Phoenix stations were among those that lost their Fox affiliation to New World as part of that group's 12-station blanket affiliation agreement with Fox earlier this month. That deal touched off the current scramble.

In moving to ABC, the Baltimore station will cut loose its NBC affiliation.

For its part, ABC is giving up VHF affiliates in Phoenix and Tampa, KTVK and WTSP, respectively. Its new affiliates there are UHF stations, which generally provide poorer coverage.

ABC is abandoning WJZ-TV Baltimore, but the relationship already was soured by the station's preemptions, which promised to grow with its acquisition of local baseball rights.

Having lost its affiliates in Cleveland and Detroit as a result of the New World-Fox deal, CBS had targeted Scripps Howard for a comprehensive affiliation deal of its own. ABC beat CBS to it.

The news is not all bad for CBS, however. It may now gain ABC's VHF castoff in Tampa, WTVT. Tampa was one of eight markets where it lost affiliates due to New World-Fox.

CBS already had a VHF option in Phoenix, where it also lost to Fox, but still faces the prospect of UHF carriage in both Detroit and Cleveland.

That ABC was able to beat out CBS with the Scripps Howard stations was attributed to ABC's appeal in urban

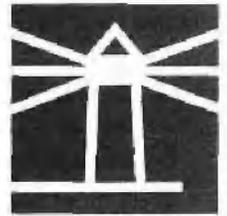
markets such as Cleveland and Detroit, and the fact that ABC was the incumbent there.

Last week's news means the damage from the Fox-New World deal is being spread more evenly among the networks, says David Poltrack, president of research, CBS/Broadcast Group. In Baltimore, the fact that ABC will change stations means its ratings will suffer, he says.

NBC also will be hurt there. And there were reports that WJZ-TV was talking with Fox.

ABC and Scripps Howard were still negotiating a final agreement and said little last week. But it appears their deal is little more than an affiliation agreement.

The 10-year deal does not include any equity investment or joint ventures, sources at both



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companies said. The deal will noticeably increase ABC's compensation costs, although network officials declined to be specific.

In Phoenix, owners of both unattached VHF stations were talking with CBS. Phil Jones, who heads KPHO-TV, said he expects CBS to affiliate with the now independent station. "We are going to acquire more stations than we currently have, maybe even in partnership with CBS," he said. ■

Fox faces affiliate fears in LA

Relationship has changed as network courts new affiliates

By Steve Coe

Thanks to the New World-Fox deal, which saw the network serve divorce papers to 12 of its stations, this week's affiliate meeting behind closed doors in Los Angeles promises to be one of the most contentious for the young network.

After years of harmony and the network's emphasis on marriage and partnership, Fox finds itself having to convince stations it is the same reliable, trustworthy partner it always has been.

The network and its affiliates also are divided over the fate of the prime time access rule. Under pressure to give up what the other networks see as an unfair advantage (Fox is exempt from PTAR), Fox weighed in—if somewhat halfheartedly—for repeal of PTAR. Meanwhile, the affiliates last week asked the FCC to preserve the rule, calling it "the core regulation" protecting independent television stations.

Acknowledging the rift, Fox affiliate relations chief Preston Padden said: "This position is a logical extension of our overall view" that networks and their affiliates should be deregulated."



"It still is a marriage, and the importance of remaining faithful to your partner is still there. The only difference is that we have changed some partners."

—Preston Padden

Affiliates looking for reassurances on their future from the network remain guarded in their optimism.

"First and foremost on the agenda, I would expect, is the general affiliate relationship and loyalty," said Brad Moran, vice president and general manager, KJTV-TV Lubbock, Tex., and Fox affiliate board member. "There are a lot of feelings of uneasiness. You have 12 guys who helped build the network that have been tossed aside. Affiliation has always been like a marriage, and now it seems like our spouse is cheating."

Ironically, it was only two years

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