

Industry debates responsibility issue

Stringer says V-chip may help; Poltrack says it is not network issue alone

By Steve Coe

Howard Stringer, chairman and chief executive officer, Tele-TV, told a Hollywood crowd last week that children watching television unsupervised "is a real problem."

A proposed V-chip (technology built into the TV to allow parents to block certain programs) "may be useful to some parents, probably good parents who are already interested in what their children watch," he said. "If it helps, so be it. But it shouldn't be used as a wedge for other forms of control or censorship."

Stringer was the keynote speaker at a June 14 symposium in Los Angeles, "Television: Its Impact on Society," that drew a wide range of participants and opinions. The consen-



Former FCC chairman Newton Minow

sus, however, was that TV has a responsibility to the public interest. Less clear was how well that interest was being served and how best to serve it.

Not surprisingly, Senator Bob Dole's recent commentary on the media was a recurring theme. Rather than dismiss Dole's message, some panelists at the daylong conference sponsored by the Caucus for Producers, Writers and Directors used his remarks as a starting point.

Stringer, who decried politicians who "rately watched television...but who could generate sound bites on the evils of the medium without a moment's pause," had this warning: "What does it say about artistic progress if, as happened to me not long ago, a producer felt it necessary to congratulate me for allowing a young child to utter the immortal words 'you suck' in an eight o'clock sitcom. I was told I was on the cutting edge...I don't believe that the introduction of [those] words

Warner creates distribution wing

Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution is creating a spin-off specialty distribution unit that will develop and distribute smaller first-run shows and off-network library product in syndication and for cable.

Telepictures Distribution will be an autonomous unit with sales, marketing, research and creative services under the oversight of recently promoted WBDTD Executive Vice President Scott Carlin.

"The logical question to ask is: Why create a separate distribution entity and essentially compete against ourselves?" says Carlin. "We feel an experienced team totally dedicated to a 'second label' can provide a significant additional revenue stream, and if we don't handle these potentially very profitable properties, someone else will."

An example, notes Carlin, is *Martha Stewart Living*, a successful weekly show based on a magazine owned by Time Warner's publishing unit. *Stewart* is being sold by Group W Productions instead of WBDTD so as not to tie up the latter's staff time. Carlin says Group W will continue to syndicate the show in 1995-96 but that who will handle the show in 1996-



Scott Carlin

97 is an open question.

Telepictures Distribution could spell bad news for a number of smaller syndicators that have flourished by handling smaller projects the major syndicators have until now farmed out.

WBDTD Vice President of West Coast Sales and Feature Film Marketing Vince Messina and WBDTD Vice President and Eastern Sales Manager Damian Riordan have been named senior vice presidents of Telepictures Distribution and will be in charge of day-to-day operations. Also joining the unit is WBDTD Vice President of Central Sales Bill

Hague, who will serve in an equivalent position with Telepictures Distribution, and as many as nine other staff members.

Initial shows to be offered by the unit include weekly half-hour first-run magazine show *Your Mind and Body*, which launches in fall, and the second off-network syndication cycles of *Night Court* and *Mama's Family*.

Carlin says revenue from syndication of those three shows will be enough to support the unit's operating costs.

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