

Continental, Comcast join Cox/TM team

New partners boost Outdoor Life, Speedvision; 'other' Outdoor channel keeps on plugging

By Jim McConville

Comcast and Continental Cablevision have signed on as equity partners in the Times Mirror/Cox programing partnership.

The investment will cut Times Mirror's stake to 10%. That will leave Cox with the largest stake (45%), but the new partners (22.5% each) have an opportunity eventually to become equal partners with Cox in the venture.

As part of the deal, the two new partners say they expect to launch TM/Cox's planned channels, Outdoor Life and Speedvision. According to Cox, it will carry the channels on its expanded basic tier, which reaches 3.2 million subscribers.

Comcast President Brian Roberts says of the investment: "We believe that in addition to providing special interest programing, both Outdoor Life and Speedvision have the potential to become specialty video retailing outlets for a variety of merchandise. Our

experience with QVC makes these types of programing services especially appealing."

Continental Vice Chairman Tim Neher says, "In this competitive era, it is becoming increasingly important for cable operators to make strategic investments in [the] content business." He calls Outdoor Life and Speedvision "especially attractive."

Speedvision, the channel for plane, boat and automobile aficionados, is slated to launch in first quarter 1996.

Outdoor Life had been slated to launch this month, but Times Mirror's recent fiscal reassessment had put all its operations, current and planned, under renewed scrutiny.

Outdoor Life President and CEO Roger Werner had said earlier in the week that he expected cable systems to start picking up the channel "fairly quickly." Times Mirror/Cox has pledged to spend \$100 million each to launch Outdoor and Speedvision.

Following announcement of the new

partners, Werner said "plans for Outdoor Life and Speedvision are on track." He said that Outdoor Life's launch may be further delayed, however, "due to the change in ownership structure."

Meanwhile, the news of the new capital infusion to Outdoor Life could not have been well received at the "other" outdoor channel. "It's sort of been a struggle identifying our own network in the marketplace, with Outdoor Life's very expensive marketing campaign pushing into the segment that we're in," says Andrew Dale, vice president of production, the Outdoor Channel. Created by brothers Perry and Thomas Massie as an outgrowth of their gold prospecting hobby, the Temecula, Calif.-based Outdoor Channel started airing on low-power satellite systems in June 1993.

The Outdoor Channel is the name Times Mirror/Cox originally chose for its network, but it had to change it to Outdoor Life after a court ruled that the Outdoor Channel had first dibs.

The Outdoor Channel filled its initial 45 hours of weekly programing primarily with prospecting programs and a library of old westerns. Prospecting has shrunk to 15% of channel programing, replaced by programs on fishing, sailing, scuba diving, hunting, shooting and other outdoor pursuits.

Dale says the channel's predominantly male viewership will change as the network adds more programing appealing to female viewers.

The advertiser-supported Outdoor Channel averages six minutes of commercials per half hour.

Outdoor Channel now reaches 2 million subscribers in the U.S., Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. The network is carried by 26 small regional cable operators reaching approximately 400,000 subscribers. It also is carried by 19 low-power TV affiliates and on C-band and other TVRO satellite systems. Outdoor Channel Chairman and CEO Perry Massie says the network's goal is to reach a combined 4 million viewers by the end of 1995.

Dale says the network is talking with major MSOs and satellite systems about carriage, but he concedes the going is rough. ■

PEOPLE'S CHOICE: TOP CABLE SHOWS

Following are the top 15 basic cable programs for the week of July 17-23, ranked by households tuning in. The cable-network ratings are percentages of the total households each network reaches. The U.S. ratings are percentages of the 95.4 million households with TV sets. Source: Nielsen Media Research.

Program	Network	Time (ET)	HHs. (000)	Rating Cable U.S.
1. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Tue 7:00p	2,749	4.2 2.9
2. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Wed 5:00p	2,680	4.1 2.8
3. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Tue 5:30p	2,652	4.0 2.8
4. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Wed 5:30p	2,633	4.0 2.8
5. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Thu 5:30p	2,618	4.0 2.7
6. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Mon 5:00p	2,593	3.9 2.7
7. News Update	CNN	Thu 6:15p	2,589	3.9 2.7
8. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Tue 7:30p	2,552	3.9 2.7
9. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Mon 5:30p	2,537	3.8 2.7
10. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Tue 8:00p	2,532	3.8 2.7
11. Rugrats	NICK	Sun 10:00a	2,472	3.9 2.6
12. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Tue 6:25p	2,465	3.7 2.6
13. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Mon 6:25p	2,406	3.6 2.5
14. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Tue 6:00p	2,391	3.6 2.5
15. O.J. Simpson Trial	CNN	Thu 7:30p	2,276	3.4 2.4

Following are the top five pay-cable programs for the week of July 17-23, ranked by households tuning in. Source: Nielsen Media Research.

1. Movie: 'Wolf'	HBO	Sun 10:30p	2,218	9.4 2.3
2. Movie: 'Mart Lawrence You So Crazy'	HBO	Sat 10:00p	2,207	9.4 2.3
3. Movie: 'Wolf'	HBO	Tue 8:00p	2,144	9.1 2.2
4. Movie: 'Demolition Man'	HBO	Sun 8:00p	2,118	9.0 2.2
5. Movie: 'Body Language'	HBO	Sat 8:00p	2,078	8.8 2.2