

using 750 mhz upgrades. As a result, Levinson says, distribution of the HBO multiplex service has grown by 23.5% in the past year alone.

Most of the cable operators that have launched the multiplex so far have done so on rebuilt systems, says Levinson. Rebuilt systems with expanded channel

capacity, however, do not necessarily guarantee carriage for the pay-TV multiplex. Competition includes pay-per-view movies, which, like HBO, provide cable system operators a revenue stream unregulated by the FCC.

HBO also is fighting for channel position with new basic networks,

many of which are guaranteed slots as a result of FCC-ordered retransmission consent negotiations with broadcasters.

Levinson says HBO is announcing its plans to expand to 12 channels now so that affiliates can prepare their strategies for the digitally compressed systems of the future. ■

Cable solos on V-chip

Broadcasters decline to appear at New York seminar

By Jim McConville

Cable networks have taken a different approach from broadcast networks to the issue of TV program ratings and the V-chip, both contained in telco-reform legislation expected to pass Congress perhaps as early as late last week.

Although cable networks have gone on record supporting a ratings system, broadcast networks have balked, citing infringement of their First Amendment freedoms and their expectation that the issue will wind up in court.

That division was highlighted last week at a panel in New York that included Viacom's Tony Cox and representatives of several interested citizen groups.

The four major TV networks and the National Association of Broadcasters

declined an invitation to attend Children Now's "Children and the Media" conference, held at Columbia University. Oakland, Calif.-based Children Now bills itself as a "nonprofit, non-partisan organization promoting children's policy."

"It's fair to say that broadcasters are strongly opposed to the V-chip and the notion of TV ratings, and they plan to fight it," says Victoria Rideout, director of Children Now's Children and the Media program and conference moderator.

National Association of Broadcasters spokeswoman Patty O'Neil says the NAB declined to attend the conference because of the NAB's opposition to any government-sponsored TV ratings system, which it says violates broadcasters' First Amendment rights. A prepared NAB statement says the group has "very serious concerns about

government-imposed restrictions on [TV] program content...and is deeply disappointed that the V-chip provision included in the pending telecommunications bill in essence requires a government-imposed ratings system."

In contrast, those participating in the Children Now conference's "The V-Chip: Where Do We Go from Here?" discussion said they generally support a TV ratings system, but they differ on how to implement it.

David Moulton, chief of staff for Representative Ed Markey (D-Mass.), who has been the driving force behind the V-chip, says that if the TV industry doesn't develop its own ratings system in the next 12 months, then the FCC will. The FCC's first step if the industry balks, says Moulton, will be to create an advisory committee to draw up an outside, but still voluntary, ratings system. The second step will be to require TV set manufacturers to install V-chips, Moulton says.

If the panelists were any gauge, an industry ratings system appears a long way off.

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The **International Olympic Committee** (IOC) nipped Rupert Murdoch's latest sports acquisition ambitions in the bud last week, awarding exclusive European broadcast rights to the Olympic games from 2000 to 2008 to the **European Broadcasting Union** (EBU), the body that represents Europe's public broadcasters. Although the IOC received higher offers than EBU's—a consortium including Rupert Murdoch reportedly bid \$2 billion—the EBU, which has been broadcasting the Olympics since 1960, offered \$1.4 billion plus a 50-50 profit share arrangement, the details of which are not yet final. Richard Bunn, sports controller for the EBU, said the IOC's decision was based on "other issues besides money."

The UK's **Channel 5 Broadcasting** (C5B) consortium breathed a sigh of relief last week after a judge upheld the Independent Television Commission's (ITC) decision to award C5B a fifth terrestrial television broadcast license. Virgin, a consortium comprising Richard Branson's Virgin, Paramount, Associated Newspapers, Philips and Elektra, had demanded judicial review,

arguing that the ITC had broken its own rules by advising C5B to increase its cash commitment by an additional £100 million (\$150 million) some 15 weeks after the closing dates for bids last May.

The UK's **ITV** acquired Aaron Spelling's one-hour drama *Savannah* from Worldvision at NATPE and is close to signing a deal with MCA for action series *Heracles*.

Sony Entertainment will launch a Portuguese version of its Latin American service in February, according to Michael Grindon, president, Columbia TriStar International Television. The Brazilian edition had been scheduled to bow in November 1995. The Latin service is available to 800,000 homes via the PAS-1 satellite.

Bell Canada wants to begin trials of cable television, telephony and video on demand in Canada. The telco has applied to the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission for permission to conduct two trials in Repentigny, Quebec, and London, Ontario.

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