News Corp. builds syndication muscle

Twentieth gets expanded first-run launchpad

By Cynthia Littleton

News Corp.'s buyout of New World has made Fox's Twentieth Television arm the 800-pound gorilla of the syndication marketplace, but it also raises questions about the fate of New World shows set for launch in less than two months.

With the Fox O&O group swelling, Twentieth has clear advantage over competitors in launching first-run product, and the stations gain new leverage in negotiating with outside suppliers.

Fox is likely to fold New World's production and distribution operations—valued at about $450 million—into Twentieth. However, Chase Carey, chairman of Fox Television, stressed last week that no decisions will be made until all New World assets are thoroughly evaluated.

Brandon Tartikoff, chairman of New World Entertainment, made a quick evaluation and decided to resign.

Tartikoff said the deal will create a powerful force in television. "However, my personal and professional goals are to get closer to the product, and therefore I concluded that those goals will be best fulfilled elsewhere."

Tartikoff, whose Moving Target Productions was bought by New World for $9 million in 1994, said he intends to remain active in network development and step up activities with his book imprint, Brandon Tartikoff Books.

New World Entertainment had an uneven record under Tartikoff's two-year tenure. In network prime time, the dramas Strange Luck and Profit had brief runs on Fox last season, but Second Noah is getting a second season on NBC.

On the syndication side, Fox went into business overnight with NBC on a new entertainment magazine strip, Access Hollywood, set to launch in September in prime access on the New World and NBC O&Os. The show is the first in a 10-year deal New World struck last year with NBC to co-produce first-run programs.

Although Fox and NBC have battled publicly in the past, both sides say Access Hollywood remains a definite go in September. The fate of two other new New World shows on tap for fall was unclear last week, although industry observers noted that Fox won't risk generating ill will with broadcasters by withdrawing shows so late in the year.

Fox also inherits New World's deal with producer Stephen J. Cannell, whose production company was bought by New World last year.

New World was also preparing to launch a late-night strip, Loveline, taking advantage of the time period commitments it received on the Fox network and its O&Os as part of New World's ground-breaking affiliation/programming pact with Fox.

Top of the Week

NEWS CORP.'S NEW MEDIA WORLD

News Corp (NYSE: NWS, NWSA): $9.71 billion
New World (Nasdaq: NWCG): $505 million
TV station group (all Fox affiliates): 32 stations

Coverage of U.S. households: 34.83% FCC count* (40.35% full markets)

* New York ch. 5
KV Los Angeles ch. 11
WTX Chicago ch. 32
WJZ Philadelphia ch. 29
WTX Boston ch. 25
WJW Washington, D.C.

New World Sales

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