

A Community Antenna or Cable Television system (CATV) consists of: 1) super antenna to pick up broadcast signals, 2) a "head" or "headend" which processes these signals and can serve to process locally originated signals, 3) coaxial cable which is strung via telephone poles or city ducts to the home TV sets. Subscribers generally pay \$5 a month for the hookup. Cable capacity is presently 12 or 20 channels and in San Jose, California a 42 channel capacity is being installed.

(BINGO) was the big news in this category along with a new version for kids, (LINGO), instructional materials for use exclusively on an educational channel, produced by National Instructional Television, and a package of NET productions. All of these offerings obviously produced originally for broadcast purposes and aimed at the mass market.

There were three presentations that were geared specifically to the cable market: a series of short programs that could be integrated into a locally produced show by wrapping around them a local narrator or guest personality, format packages, which were offered by CBS and International Tele-Cable Productions, Inc., headed by Bert Claster of Romper Room fame, included full instructions for local originations right down to the hiring of personnel, the construction of sets, in addition to scripts, film inserts and ongoing seminars for the newly hired local "talent". (Really a do-it-yourself kit for smaller versions of the standard mediocre television fare now offered by over the air television.) The locally-originated packages, "Local and Live" as one supplier labeled them fit into the following programming descriptions: Shows for the pre-schooler—these usually propert to teach as well as entertain, a la Sesame Street. How-to shows—how to be more beautiful, have a more beautiful home, cook more beautiful food, have a more beautiful figure, play a more beautiful guitar, predict a more beautiful future, etc., etc. Sports shows—about bowling, fishing, golf, etc., etc. Travel formats—where to go on your next vacation. Reviews—latest cultural offerings reviewed by famous personalities. Game shows—applications of old techniques revamped for television.

The other locally oriented alternative was a plan for leasing channels outright to programmers. Kepler Television Productions, Inc., proposed to lease a channel from the cable operators which they would supply with 20 hours of programming per week. As part of their plan, they would create a local corporation in every town that subscribes to their service that will hire and train community residents to produce and sell local programming. The charge to the cable operator for this service is \$1.00 per subscriber per year or 5% of the gross of advertising revenue. This plan is currently in effect in Glassport, Pennsylvania and Kingsport, Tennessee.

The local CATV system in Cherow, South Carolina has already been operating under a similar leasing situation. A former disc jockey leases a channel on this 1,000 subscriber system and produces and sells ads for his own record show. The Jefferson-Carolina Corp. is planning a similar arrangement for its 5,000 subscriber system in Greensboro, North Carolina, leasing a channel to a local radio station so that they can cablecast their DJ's. Many systems are leasing channels to the local school systems for their own productions. This leasing concept has been encouraged by the FCC in order to create a variety of programming choices as well as a diversity in those who control these new channels of communication. The presentation of this particular alternative didn't seem to be met with great glee by the assembled cable owners.

In addition to all these program offerings there was advice as to the best way to market the shows, which neighborhood retailer would most likely buy which show, as well as promises of future sales forces that would sell the shows for the cablecaster in both the regional and national markets.

The price for all these programs and services ranges from \$100 to \$200 an hour for the majority of the cable systems presently in operation. However, due to the youth of the industry, most of the software suppliers were willing to make individual deals with individual cable systems rather than quote general rates. Most of the programmers were actually trying to determine what the market would bear and will probably be ready for more specific rate statements by next season.

It is important to note that after these 24 exhibitors finished giving their "pitches," had talked intimately with the cable people in their "hospitality suites" and shared a drink or two, most of the cable operators were not buying. Whether indeed this was due to a lack of funds, need for thinking time or the realization, as some claimed, that most of the materials presented would not satisfy the requirements for locally oriented fare time will tell. However, the first stage in the development of an ongoing marriage between cable caster and programmer had begun. As one official of the NCTA said, "These people will be living with each other for many years to come and so the first introductions had to be made." That indeed was the underlying rationale for the conference.

Quite obviously most of the presentations and discussions at the meeting reflected an overriding concern with the monetary potentials of cable, the advertising dollars and consequently the entertainment form of programming that has been geared to the tastes of the general mass market. There was isolated talk here and there about "a promising new technology," "two-way systems," "computer inputs," "new localized service," "de-centralized forms of communications," "means of giving voice to a cross-section of the community," etc., etc., however, they were only words hanging in the air, with no hard facts, no real program plans to give them credence. When pressed about the promise of cable, particularly in the area of service to the minority groups in the community, most would point with pride to Teleprompter and the excellent job they are doing in servicing the Harlem community. Yes it is true that Irving Kahn, President of Teleprompter, does talk a great deal about the ability of cable to broadcast its message to geographical units as small as one neighborhood and the service it can therefore provide for the minority community. However, its present programming for that community is limited to one show, *Lunch at Frank's* a black version of the old *Lunch at Sardi's* of early radio and television days, and is carried into the homes of all the Teleprompter subscribers, which includes most of uptown Manhattan. Obviously, the capability of a filtering system that allows you to address directly one segment of the larger wired community, one of the truly innovational aspects of cable, is not being utilized. Whatever is produced is sent to every home, relevant or not. In addition, the choice of this program as the first production to be offered to the black community leaves much to be desired. It would be easy to imagine over hundreds of alternative ideas that would certainly provide more honest service to the residents of the Harlem community.

The FCC edict declaring programming diversity and the recommendations in the President's Task Force on Communications Policy Report all suggest that a wide variety of needs, interests and tastes be served via television: "The structure of the industry should make it possible to cater to as wide a variety of tastes as possible, the tastes of small audiences and mass audiences, of cultural minorities and of cultural majorities. Ours is a pluralistic society, in cultures as well as in the ethnic origins and the life-styles of its people. A medium of expression as pervasive as television should reflect and enrich this cultural pluralism." The fact that the programming choices as well as the faces in attendance at this first programming convention—cable operators meeting in Chicago did not include any members of the black community, nor for that matter were there any brown or yellow faces in the crowd, is just another indication of the lack of involvement of minority groups in this new technology. This is true both of the representatives of the systems as well as the software suppliers and therefore strongly reflected in the programming fare being offered to the cable industry. Indeed, the only time a black face was in evidence during the two days of the convention was at mealtimes when waiters entered the conference rooms, or on one other occasion, a piece of film exhibited by NET showing excerpts from past productions. The strong implication that the programming choices were even less representative of minority groups than present day television programming cannot be ignored. A sorry beginning for the newest member of the communications industry.

But what is frightening is that this is happening in 1970, a decade marked by a growing extremism which threatens the very core of our society, an urban plight that continues to go unheeded, a growing sense of outrage, amongst the disadvantaged minorities who feel the lash of tokenism, an equally strong militance emerging from the white middle class sector reflecting their sense of impotence, a growing awareness of the desecration of our natural resources, cries for peace answered with fists, fears of economic failure evidenced in the de-escalating Dow Jones averages, and a general overriding feeling of despair and hopelessness for many of the inhabitants of this country. The need for the constructive development of this new form of communications is imperative. We can't afford to waste this new resource, we must find the way to utilize this technology to speak to some if not all of the ills of our gasping society.



CABLE TELEVISION: A NEW BALLGAME?

Present

Cable television has come to New York City! We've all seen the advertisements on the crosstown bus, the signs in bar windows—WE ARE ON THE CABLE. COME IN AND SEE THE KNICKS AND RANGERS opened our morning mail to offers of free installation and even a few month's of free service. Yes, New York City, along with most of the nation, is gradually growing into a Wired City, a place where many of its inhabitants will be sending off a \$6.00 check once a month to his local cable company along with payments for telephone service, gas, rent and that ever present Bloomingdale's bill. Yes, it will soon become another given expenditure, a necessity, like air and water, something we will be hooked on. Irving Kahn, President of Teleprompter, one of the companies presently franchised to operate cable here in our town, described this phenomenon rather accurately when he said, "... cable is the next best thing to a legal narcotic. Once you get on the cable, you never get off."

Yes, we will be sold on the virtues of cable television, the fact that it can bring us studio quality reception on every channel, no more ghosts, no more snow, no interference, no frustrating flip-flops, 24 hour news, weather and stock reports, the matchless presence of today's natural high-fidelity colorcasting, locally oriented programs, old movies and in some parts of the city the already mentioned home games of the New York Rangers and the winning Knicks.

What a cheat! As usual we shall be taken, had if you will, shelling out our hard earned dollars for a service that is a pittance of the infinite possibilities that this new technology could bring into our lives. We shall be paying for a better picture of the same old garbage, the type of enlightened, innovational, inspired programming that is currently carried on over the air television... a clearer image of Johnny Carson's newest sport jacket... a truer rendition of Lucille Ball's red hair in those *I Love Lucy* reruns, or locally produced programs of a similar nature... not worth the six bucks a month. But so goes the fate of the inhabitants of this fair city and nation—had again.

My intention is not to harangue you, nor to make you angry or even resentful of this new "service" that has dropped into your snowy television picture, for that would be unfair and just add to the heavy bundle of frustrations that you already carry around with you daily. Nor for that matter is my intention to take pot shots at the cable industry, for that would create more hostility and not better use of the technology. No, my purpose is to show you some of the real services that the cable industry could perform, as well as ways that these services could come into being, and then hope that you will be inspired enough to go out and do something about getting them for yourself.

Contrary to many of the other frustrations plaguing the lives of city dwellers today, there really is something immediate and effective that all of us can do to guide the growth of the cable industry. The youth of the industry coupled with the fact that local municipalities have a great deal of the responsibility for the creation of the laws governing CATV, make it much more possible for the average citizen to have his say and be listened to. The youth of the industry means that the vested interests are not as strongly entrenched as they are in the more established service industries—telephone, gas and electric.

The local governments have become heir to this regulatory function to some degree because the cable operators require access to the public thorough-fare in order to lay or string their wires throughout the town. Therefore the cable operators must go to the city municipalities in order to gain franchises, or permission, to wire up the area. It is possible that in the future the FCC may well pre-empt all rule-making regarding CATV, as they did in regard to the origination requirements for all local cable systems. This ruling, requiring all systems with over 3,500 subscribers to begin local programming of significant degree by January, 1970 pre-empted New York City's ban on the showing of feature films by cable operators. However, the evidence is fairly clear that the FCC would welcome creative law making on the part of local governments and is indeed looking towards the cities for guidelines in certain specific areas. In fact, the Mayor's Task Force Report on Cable Television released in New York City during the winter of 1969 still serves as the most definitive statement regarding the development of franchise agreements that protect the rights of the citizens as well as the city and the cable system owner. Even though the recommendations of this report have still not been implemented it is often quoted in government circles and will most definitely affect the body of laws governing the industry.

The resident of New York City, as well as those of Chicago, and other cities, are in a particularly advantageous position for they will be able to make their desire for "full service" known to the city government within the next few months. In New York, franchises that had been awarded by the Bureau of Franchises to Teleprompter Corporation, Manhattan Cable Television, and CATV Enterprises, the three companies presently serving Manhattan and Riverdale, have expired and new agreements are in the offing. At the same time that service for Manhattan and Riverdale will be under examination the awarding of new franchises to serve the other parts of the country will also be under consideration. Whether indeed this will be done through a competitive bidding system or a procedure similar to that now required by the FCC in granting licenses to broadcast applicants, or some combination of both will be under our scrutiny via public hearings.

These combinations—laws that have still not been written, the absence of well entrenched, strong vested interests and the closeness of the local governing bodies implementing and developing these new ruling is the ray of hope that I offer to you. Of course, contrary to what Mr. Kahn has said regarding a legal narcotic, once hooked—always hooked, there is always the last alternative of cutting the new umbilical cord and also access to your dollars. But let's leave that as the last resort while we try to guide the cable industry down the path of public service as well as profits.

Past

The history of the cable industry begins in the small towns and rural areas of our country. Originally the systems were designed to provide service to these outlying areas that had difficulty in receiving over the air television signals. This service, the importation of distant signals and the improved reception described earlier, was accomplished by erecting a master antenna in a favorable location and running coaxial cable from the master into the homes where the receiving sets were housed. As these systems moved down from the hills and into the cities with improved equipment, they grew more sophisticated in regard to the future implications of such a service. Companies began building "headend" facilities where the signal is filtered and amplified, and then transmitted via the coaxial cable or microwave to the television receiving sets of subscribers. This filtering system makes it technologically feasible to directly address one segment of the larger wired community. Therefore such a system could be constructed to speak to the needs of one small community, one block or even one apartment house. Thus the diversity of programming so sadly lacking in over-the-air television could be theoretically accomplished through the multiplicity of channels.

Future

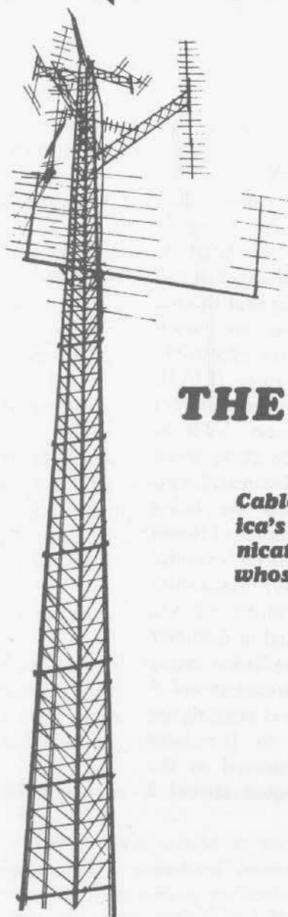
... potential capabilities of modern technology—newspapers that roll off your television set, home retailing services, computer data available through push buttons in your living room, interconnection of municipal governments throughout the country, and opportunity to participate in national and local referendums via the television screen... cable television could well be the practical realization through which these concepts can become a reality. Due to the broadband capability of cable which can carry voice, television and record information simultaneously into the home, office or classroom, what has appeared as plans for a tomorrowland may well be made available today.

The constructive use of television as an information system rather than exclusively as an entertainment medium becomes more and more possible as the miles of cable are laid throughout this country. Yet most of the evidence, a recent cable programming conference, the present systems in operation, the type of hardware that is presently being purchased by the cable operators for their systems, the fact that only two systems now under construction will have the capability of carrying 40 channels of video and audio information, while the majority of the systems have only a 12 channel capability with a few systems currently installing equipment with a 20 channel capability, and the type of programming presently offered on the cable, leads you to believe that cable is going down a different road from futuristic or social concerns... with its primary concern for profits like the present broadcast system...

The above cable articles by Thea Sklover are rough drafts for a broad report on cable she is preparing. This material is copyrighted.

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RALPH LEE SMITH

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