



# Electronic Media

THE PROGRAMMING PUBLICATION

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## AT PRESS TIME

### Tauzin asks FCC to delay move

WASHINGTON—Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., last week asked the Federal Communications Commission to put its plans to move to a new building on hold until the deal had been thoroughly investigated. Rep. Tom Bliley, R-Va., also set a Dec. 2 deadline for Franklin Haney, a major investor in the new building, to cooperate with a House Commerce Committee probe into the deal. Congress has also asked the Congressional Accounting Office to look into the arrangement.

### Grossi's future at UPN uncertain

LOS ANGELES—Sources say UPN Senior Executive Vice President Len Grossi has been in discussions with the network about his future role with the company. Some say a departure might be in the works, but UPN wouldn't comment. Separately, sources say Mr. Grossi has reunited with former UPN President and CEO Lucie Salhany to form a company  
*(See Second Front, Page 55)*

## Ratings don't faze kids—or parents

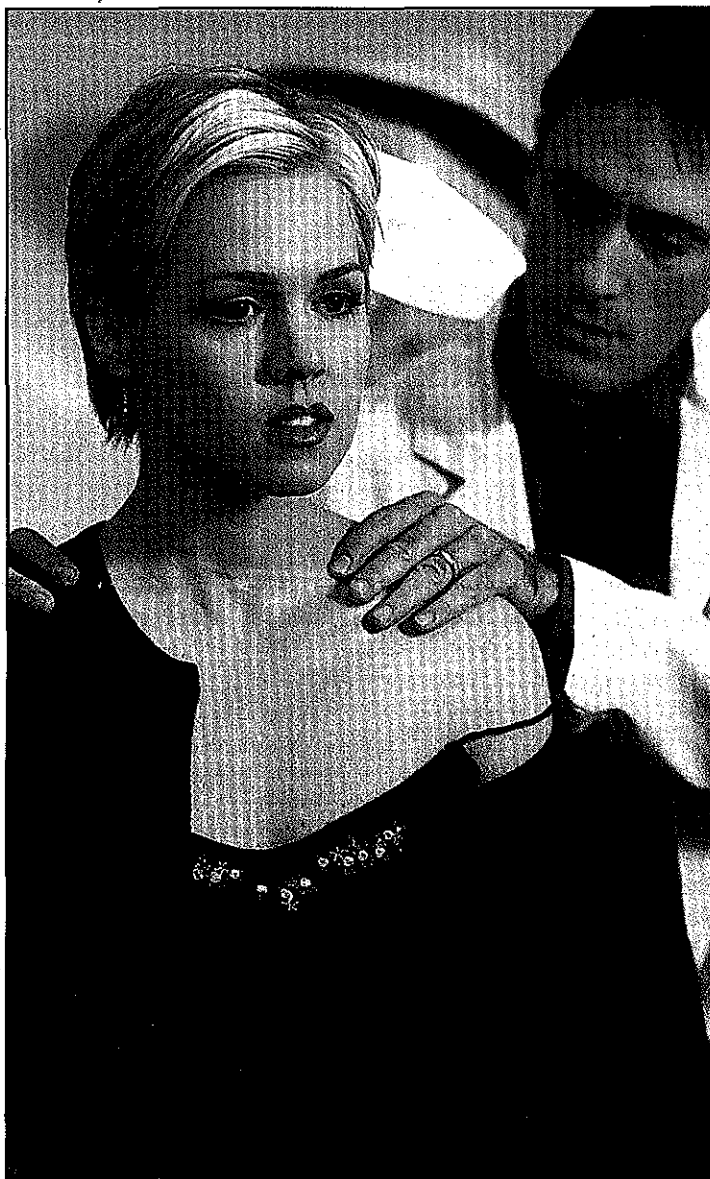
BY MICHAEL SCHNEIDER  
STAFF REPORTER

LOS ANGELES—Nine weeks after three of the four major broadcast networks implemented the revised content ratings system, it appears to have had very little effect on kids viewing.

According to information obtained by ELECTRONIC MEDIA from Nielsen Media Research, for the most part kids have not stopped watching shows that now occasionally carry one or more of the content labels (L for questionable language, S for sexual situations, D for racy dialogue and V for violence).

But, just as significant, fewer kids are watching as much network television of any kind these days.

Big 4 network viewership among  
*(Continued on Page 50)*



"Beverly Hills, 90210," with Jennie Garth, sometimes carries a V or S label, but its ratings in kids 2 to 11 are up from last year.

## Huge deal to rescue Telemundo

### Sony, Liberty buy in

BY MIKE GALETTO  
STAFF REPORTER

A change worthy of El Niño could be in line for Telemundo Group, following last week's \$700 million acquisition of the Spanish-language broadcaster by an investor group including Sony Pictures Entertainment and Liberty Media Corp.

"It's going to need a complete make over. We're talking about a company that's lost a lot of market share," said Jessica Reif Cohen, media analyst with Merrill Lynch Global Securities.

TCI has big plans  
for Telemundo.  
Page 51

Telemundo's share of the Hispanic market over the last five years has declined to less than 20 percent from almost 40 percent, while competitor Univision Communications has grown to more than 80 percent.

And the problems aren't just in programming. Analysts also forecast a shake-up within Telemundo's sales department. In the third fiscal quarter, the network lost \$3.4 million.

Some will welcome change. Advertising executives have grumbled in the past that Telemundo, even amid declining market share and operating losses, insisted on keeping its ad-time prices artificially high.

On one analyst's wish list: "completely new people that will come and make some changes."

Telemundo executives couldn't be reached for comment by press time. In a press release, President and Chief Executive Officer Roland Hernandez said the company expects viewers, advertisers and Telemundo employees to "benefit greatly" from the acquisition.

Last week an investor group including Telemundo Chairman Leon Black's Apollo Management LP,  
*(Continued on Page 51)*

## NBC makes new all-night plan

BY JON LAFAYETTE  
NEW YORK BUREAU CHIEF

They could call it "Must Stay Awake TV."

NBC West Coast President Don Ohlmeyer is working on a plan to schedule NBC-owned entertainment programming from 2 a.m. to 5 a.m., opening up a new daypart for the network.

Sources said the programming would include

old episodes of "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno," "Saturday Night Live" and some NBC soap operas. The new schedule could be in place as soon as the beginning of next season.

The entertainment programming might replace all or part of the overnight newscast, "NBC Nightside."

Mr. Ohlmeyer declined to discuss specifics of the  
*(Continued on Page 50)*

### CONSULTANT TO THE CZARS

Michael Wolf's business advice is a secret weapon of many media moguls

### SPECIAL REPORT: ASIAN TV

Gauging the fallout from economic woes, a look at Asia's influences on U.S. TV and more

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## THIS WEEK IN EM

**A change worthy** of El Nino could be in line for Telemundo Group, following last week's \$700 million acquisition of the Spanish-language broadcaster. (Page 1) Also, TCI has plans for the Hispanic market that comes with the proposed Telemundo deal. (Page 1)

**NBC is working** on a plan to schedule entertainment programming in overnight hours. (Page 1)

**MTV Networks** will offer a package of seven commercial-free digital music video channels, called MTV Suite. (Page 3)

**The November sweeps** are over and NBC, CBS and Fox are claiming victory of one sort or another. (Page 3)

**Could the days** of sweeps months be numbered? (Page 3)

**"The X-Files"** is a huge success in syndication. (Page 3)

**Time Warner Cable's** Houston divi-



**Michael Wolf** talks about what's ahead for newly formed companies. Page 14

sion is growing subscriber counts substantially faster than the rest of the industry. (Page 4)

**Lifetime Entertainment** will launch spinoff channel Lifetime Movie Network next September. (Page 4)

**Washington** is firing up the legislative burner for a rewrite of the Satellite Home Viewer Act next year. (Page 4)

**Steve Friedman** knows he's facing

an Olympian challenge at WCBS-TV, New York. (Page 6)

**The reality genre** resurfaces, as viewers will watch the darndest things. (Page 6)

**A look inside** the ESPN SportsZone newsroom on a busy game day. (Page 18)

**Nielsen has a new system** for Web site audience measurement. (Page 18)

**The former business manager** for WXIX-TV, Cincinnati, has been indicted on grand theft charges. (Page 53)

**Warner Bros. Domestic Television** cleared four sitcoms for off-network launch in 1999. (Page 55)

**Late-night** is the hottest battleground in syndication, with 1998 looking more competitive than 1997. (Page 55)

**DreamWorks Television** is syndicating "Spin City" with a twist. (Page 55)

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# Rivera re-ups with CNBC and gets on NBC, too

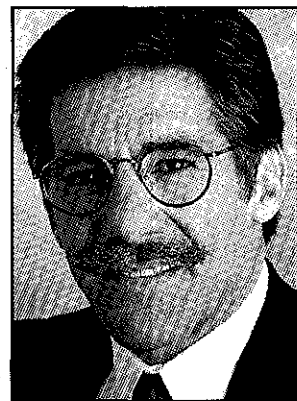
**BY JIM McCONVILLE**  
CABLE EDITOR

NEW YORK—CNBC prime-time star Geraldo Rivera wants to find out if he indeed can go home again.

Saying he wants to shed his tabloid image and return to his news roots, Mr. Rivera signed a lucrative six-year contract worth about \$40 million to stay with NBC's cable network CNBC and become a member of the NBC News team.

NBC officials declined to discuss financial details of Mr. Rivera's new contract, but industry

insiders said Mr. Rivera's CNBC contract will give him a base salary of \$4 million a year, double his current CNBC salary. With stock options and other incentives, his pay could reach \$7 million per year, which means that unlike Al Capone's empty vault, Mr. Rivera's will be filled.



**GERALDO RIVERA**  
Wants respect

But Mr. Rivera said his decision to stay with CNBC was based less on money than the chance to do more serious news.

"It was about respect—it was about coming full circle and returning to my [news] roots," he said. "I had done a lot of important things and I want to go back."

In another move, NBC put NBC News President Andy Lack in charge of CNBC's prime-time programming. He in effect becomes Mr. Rivera's boss.

Mr. Rivera started his career as a reporter for WABC-TV in New York, where he built a national reputation with a 1972 expose uncovering the inhumane conditions at Willowbrook state

school for the mentally retarded in New Jersey.

But Mr. Rivera's respectability comes with a personal price tag. As part of the deal, Mr. Rivera has to give up his 11-year-old syndicated daytime talk show, "The Geraldo Rivera Show," which earned him an estimated \$5 million per year.

Under Mr. Rivera's new deal, he becomes a member of NBC's news team, but won't guest host NBC's "Nightly News," as had been speculated by industry insiders.

Mr. Rivera will continue to host his nightly interview show "Rivera Live" and develop and host a CNBC news program tentatively scheduled to start next June, in either a 7 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. (ET) time slot.

"It will be a traditional news program called something like the 'News With Geraldo Rivera' or 'Geraldo and Company,'" Mr. Rivera said. "It will be looser and less formal. I assume that some of the 'Rivera Live' style will flap over and influence the show."

To make room for Mr. Rivera's newscast, CNBC will have to move or drop one of its current shows "Business Center" and "Great Stuff," now on between 7 and 8 p.m.

Mr. Rivera will also host four NBC News specials each year on criminal justice topics and continue as legal commentator for NBC's "Today" show.

While there was none of the kind of intense protest that greeted talk show host Jerry Springer joining the newscast at NBC's WMAQ-TV, Chicago, some NBC News staffers had concerns over Mr. Rivera's role and what his addition said about the organization.

After all, they pointed out, anchor Tom Brokaw had to go through a protracted negotiation to get a \$7 million a year contract, and Mr. Rivera got that kind of an offer over a weekend.

"How much of it is a great idea, vs. how much of it is defensive?" said one NBC News staffer.

And NBC affiliates were concerned that NBC would damage the reputation of its news department to avoid taking a hit on cable.

(Continued on Page 54)

# Auctions may speed licensing TV, radio stations at stake

**BY DOUG HALONEN**  
WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

WASHINGTON—If all goes as planned, the Federal Communications Commission will start auctioning rights to new radio and TV stations late next year.

Under the status quo, the FCC has been using comparative hearings to decide battles for the rights to broadcast licenses.

But some of the criteria that the FCC has traditionally used to decide the contests has come under attack in the courts. Critics also complain because comparative hearings have been known to go on for years without resolution.

"It was a process that just didn't work," said Bill Kennard, presiding over his first meeting as the agency's chairman last week.

"They were great if you were a lawyer in private practice, billing by the hour, but they were a travesty for the public," Mr. Kennard added.

Commissioner Susan Ness also said the threat of auctions

could spur settlements among the hundreds of applicants currently vying for radio and TV licenses.

"Clearly the licenses will be awarded much more rapidly," Ms. Ness said.

To clear the way for the auctions, Congress included a provision in a wide-ranging measure to balance the federal budget that was approved earlier this year.

Under the FCC plan unveiled last week, all but 20 of the 1,700 radio and TV station applications that were pending as of July 1 could also go on the auction block.

During the FCC meeting, several of the commissioners also endorsed giving small businesses, rural telephone companies, women and minorities some sort of discount or other break in the broadcast auctions.

"The Constitution is not a complete bar to expanding opportunities to minorities and women," said Commissioner Michael Powell.#

## CORRECTIONS

Barry Diller will become chairman and CEO of USA Networks Inc., the newly formed company that includes HSN Inc., USA Networks and Universal TV. A story in last week's issue carried an incor-

rect title.

\*\*\*

The Gaylord family trust owns a 3.2 percent stake in CB. A Nov. 24 interview with CBS Michael Jordan misstated the amount.#

DEMOGRAPHIC RATINGS

PRIME-TIME: NOV. 17-23

Households		Adults 25-54	
1. ER	NBC 23.3	1. ER	NBC 18.4
2. CBS Sunday Movie	CBS 23.0	2. Seinfeld	NBC 18.3
3. Seinfeld	NBC 22.8	3. Veronica's Closet	NBC 14.6
4. Veronica's Closet	NBC 18.5	4. CBS Sunday Movie	CBS 13.9
5. Friends	NBC 18.4	5. Friends	NBC 13.9
6. Friends Special	NBC 18.3	6. Friends Special	NBC 13.9
7. Touched by an Angel	CBS 16.7	7. X-Files	Fox 12.1
8. 60 Minutes	CBS 14.7	8. Drew Carey Show	ABC 10.6
9. CBS Special	CBS 13.8	9. Home Improvement	ABC 10.1
10. NFL Monday Night Football	ABC 13.4	10. Frasier	NBC 9.8

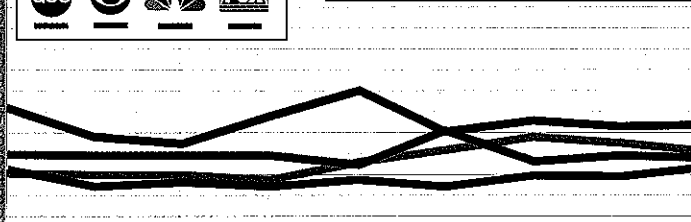
Men 25-54		Women 25-54	
1. Seinfeld	NBC 16.8	1. ER	NBC 22.3
2. ER	NBC 14.3	2. Seinfeld	NBC 19.7
3. X-Files	Fox 13.6	3. CBS Sunday Movie	CBS 17.3
4. Veronica's Closet	NBC 12.3	4. Veronica's Closet	NBC 16.8
5. NFL Monday Night Football	ABC 11.8	5. Friends	NBC 16.6
6. Friends	NBC 11.2	6. Friends Special	NBC 16.5
7. Friends Special	NBC 11.2	7. Drew Carey	ABC 11.3
8. CBS Sunday Movie	CBS 10.4	8. Home Improvement	ABC 11.1
9. Drew Carey Show	ABC 9.9	9. Frasier	NBC 11.0
1. King of the Hill	Fox 9.9	1. Touched by an Angel	CBS 11.0

SYNDICATION: NOV. 10-16

Households		Adults 25-54	
1. Wheel of Fortune	12.8 231/99%	1. Home Improvement	5.1 233/99%
2. Jeopardy	10.7 223/99%	2. Seinfeld	5.3 229/96%
3. Home Improvement	9.3 233/99%	3. Star Trek DS9*	5.1 233/98%
4. Seinfeld	8.2 223/96%	4. X-Files	5.1 238/98%
5. Oprah Winfrey Show	8.1 237/99%	5. Wheel of Fortune	4.7 231/99%
6. X-Files	7.0 238/98%	6. Jeopardy	4.3 229/99%
7. Entertainment Tonight*	6.6 177/95%	7. Xena*	4.3 233/98%
8. Star Trek DS9*	6.4 239/98%	8. Entertainment Tonight	3.7 177/95%
9. Xena*	6.2 233/98%	9. Journeys of Hercules*	3.7 236/98%
10. Simpsons*	6.1 165/86%	10. ESPN NFL Football	3.6 37/75%
		1. Frasier	3.6 182/93%
		1. Oprah Winfrey Show	3.6 237/99%

Men 25-54		Women 25-54	
1. Star Trek DS9*	5.7 239/98%	1. Wheel of Fortune	5.6 237/99%
2. Home Improvement	5.2 233/99%	2. Home Improvement*	5.6 233/99%
3. Seinfeld	5.2 223/96%	3. Seinfeld*	5.6 223/96%
4. ESPN NFL Football	5.0 37/75%	4. Oprah Winfrey Show	5.4 237/99%
5. X-Files	4.8 238/98%	5. X-Files	5.4 238/98%
6. Xena	4.5 233/98%	6. Jeopardy	5.1 223/99%
7. Winfrey Bros. Volume 30*	4.0 184/90%	7. Entertainment Tonight	4.4 177/95%
8. Buena Vista I*	3.7 175/98%	1. Star Trek DS9*	4.4 239/98%
1. Wheel of Fortune	3.7 231/99%	9. Xena	4.2 233/98%
10. Journeys of Hercules*	3.5 236/98%	10. Journeys of Hercules*	4.0 236/98%

ADULTS 18-49 PRIME-TIME RACE



NIGHT-BY-NIGHT  
NIELSEN PRIME-TIME  
HOUSEHOLD RATINGS  
FOR THE WEEK OF  
NOV. 17-23

Time slot winner

Weekly averages  
Season-to-date

- 11.4/18  
9.8/16
- 10.5/17  
11.0/18
- 8.8/14  
9.1/15
- 7.2/11  
7.4/12
- 3.4/5  
3.3/5
- 3.4/5  
3.0/5

	8 p.m.	9 p.m.	10 p.m.
<b>MONDAY</b>	1 Survived a Disaster 6.4/11	6.0/10	NFL Monday Night Football: Buffalo at Miami 13.2/20
	Cosby 10.5/16	Everybody/Raymond 9.6/15	George & Leo 9.2/14
	Suddenly Susan 8.3/13	Fired Up 7.8/12	Naked Truth 8.0/12
	Melrose Place 7.2/11	7.9/12	Ally McBeal 7.7/12
	7th Heaven 4.4/7	5.1/8	Buffy, the Vampire Slayer 3.9/5
	In the House 3.4/5	Malcolm/Eddie 3.7/6	Good News 3.5/5

	8 p.m.	9 p.m.	10 p.m.
<b>TUESDAY</b>	Home Imp., spec. 9.8/15	Soul Man 10.4/16	Home Imp. 13.1/19
	JAG 11.3/17	13.0/19	Spin City, spec. 11.5/17
	Mad About You 10.5/17	NewsRadio 8.6/13	13.8/21
	4.5/7	4.2/6	4.4/6
	Moesha 4.1/6	Clueless 3.5/5	Malcolm/Eddie 2.6/4

	8 p.m.	9 p.m.	10 p.m.
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	Spin City 9.8/16	Dharma & Greg 10.0/16	Drew Carey 11.8/18
	Nanny 7.8/12	Murphy Brown 7.4/11	Public Eye With Bryant Gumbel 7.3/11
	8.5/14	9.8/15	9.3/15
	Beverly Hills, 90210 8.1/13	8.8/14	8.0/13
	Sister, Sister 3.6/6	Smart Guy 4.0/6	Wayans Bros. 3.9/6
	Voyager 4.4/7	4.4/7	The Sentinel 2.6/4

	8 p.m.	9 p.m.	10 p.m.
<b>THURSDAY</b>	5.9/9	Movie: Medusa's Child, Part 2 5.9/9	7.1/11
	Promised Land 9.0/14	10.0/15	10.6/16
	18.4/29	18.3/28	22.8/34
	World's Deadliest Swarms 5.4/9	5.6/9	5.7/8

	8 p.m.	9 p.m.	10 p.m.
<b>FRIDAY</b>	Sabrina 9.1/16	America's Funniest Home Videos 8.0/14	Absent Minded 8.5/15
	8.7/16	8.6/15	8.7/15
	Dateline, spec. 6.9/12	7.5/13	9.5/16
	X-Files, spec. 5.9/11	6.2/11	5.7/10

	8 p.m.	9 p.m.	10 p.m.
<b>SATURDAY</b>	Adventures With the Duchess 4.3/8	3.8/7	5.0/9
	Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman 8.3/15	9.0/16	8.2/14
	5.6/10	5.8/10	7.3/13
	Cops: Kansas City 6.6/12	Cops: Fresno 7.5/13	America's Most Wanted 7.4/13

	7 p.m.	8 p.m.	9 p.m.
<b>SUNDAY</b>	Wonderful World of Disney: The Santa Clause 9.1/15	11.0/17	11.7/17
	60 Minutes 13.7/23	15.7/25	17.5/25
	NFL Football 13.4/24	Dateline 7.4/12	7.6/12
	World's Funniest Videos 5.6/9	6.3/10	9.5/14
	Nick Freno 1.9/3	Parent Hood 2.1/3	Jamie Foxx 2.7/4

SEASON-TO-DATE HOUSEHOLD PRIME-TIME RATINGS SEPT. 22-NOV. 23

Top broadcast shows			
1. ER	NBC	23.4/38	
2. Seinfeld	NBC	21.7/33	
3. Veronica's Closet	NBC	18.8/29	
4. Friends	NBC	17.6/28	
5. Touched by an Angel	CBS	15.2/23	
6. Home Improvement	ABC	14.8/22	
7. NFL Monday Night Football	ABC	14.7/25	
8. X-Files	Fox	14.3/20	
t. Union Square	NBC	14.3/23	
10. CBS Sunday Movie	CBS	14.0/22	
11. Frasier	NBC	13.7/20	
12. 60 Minutes	CBS	13.4/22	
13. Dateline NBC-Tuesday	NBC	12.5/21	
14. NYPD Blue	ABC	12.3/21	
15. Mad About You	NBC	12.1/19	
16. Drew Carey Show	ABC	11.8/18	
17. 20/20	ABC	11.7/22	
18. PrimeTime Live	ABC	11.6/20	
19. Just Shoot Me	NBC	11.5/18	
20. NFL Monday Showcase	ABC	11.3/18	
t. Dateline NBC-Monday	NBC	11.3/19	
22. NFL Sunday post-game	Fox	11.1/18	
23. Soul Man	ABC	11.0/17	
24. CBS Tuesday Movie	CBS	10.8/17	
25. Cosby	CBS	10.7/17	
26. King of the Hill	Fox	10.6/15	
t. Law and Order	NBC	10.6/18	
28. NFL Sunday post-game	Fox	10.5/18	
t. Hiller and Diller	ABC	10.5/16	
t. Dharma & Greg	ABC	10.5/16	
31. Diagnosis Murder	CBS	10.4/16	
t. Dateline NBC-Friday	NBC	10.4/18	
33. Simpsons	Fox	10.2/15	
34. Walker, Texas Ranger	CBS	10.0/18	
t. Promised Land	CBS	10.0/16	
36. Ellen	ABC	9.9/15	
t. Everybody Loves Raymond	CBS	9.9/15	
t. NewsRadio	NBC	9.9/15	
39. Wonderful World of Disney	ABC	9.7/15	
t. Caroline in the City	NBC	9.7/14	
t. Chicago Hope	CBS	9.7/17	
42. JAG	CBS	9.4/15	

# Kids aren't letting shows' content labels stop them

(Continued from Page 1)

kids 2 to 11 is down 11 percent this November sweeps vs. last year, according to Nielsen data. To a large extent, they've defected to cable and the two emerging networks wooing youngsters 2 to 11 years old.

From Oct. 30, 1997, to Nov. 19, 1997, the four major networks averaged a 10.8 rating (percentage of TV households) and 44 share (percentage of sets in use) among kids, compared to a 12.2/48 average throughout November 1996.

Most of those viewers have gone over to cable (especially Nickelodeon, which began airing shows in prime time this past January), and The WB and UPN. The WB is up 14 percent in kids viewership (2.2/8 to 2.5/8) while UPN is up 7 percent (1.9/7 to 2.1/7).

## Kids watching 'NYPD'

But for sure, kids aren't being turned away from television that content raters find inappropriate.

For example, ABC's "NYPD Blue" (which frequently carries a TV-14 rating and S, L, V or D) averaged a 1.6 rating among kids 2 to 11 from Oct. 1, when the revised ratings were implemented, to Nov. 16. That means more than 630,000 kids under 12 watched every week, despite strong advisories. That number is virtually unchanged from the same period last year, when "NYPD Blue" averaged a 1.7 rating among kids.

Other examples: "Everybody Loves Raymond" (which occasionally carries an L rating) had a 2 kids rating vs. 1.9 a year ago; "Beverly Hills, 90210" (sometimes carries a V or S), 2.7 last year vs. 3.2 this year; "Melrose Place" (sometimes a S, L or V), 2.3 last year vs. 2.8 this year.

Fox's "The Simpsons," which was recently given a "V" label due to on-screen violence (ironically, probably because of the show's "Itchy & Scratchy" shorts, which parody violent cartoons), is actually up this year in the kids 2-to-11 demographic, averaging a 7.6 rating, compared to 6.4 at this point in 1996.

"I haven't really noticed a change, either," said Larry Hyams, ABC vice president of prime-time audience analysis. "Patterns in effect before the new system are basically the patterns we saw afterward. It would be very difficult to attribute any change to the ratings system."

Mark Buse, a top aide to Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee and a strong proponent of TV ratings, said it's unfair to conclude that the ratings are being ignored.

"We never intended for the ratings system to effect, positively or negatively, TV viewership," he said. Mr. Buse likened TV ratings to food labels, which exist despite the fact that lots of people eat unhealthy food.

## 'Give parents information'

What the Nielsen data fails to show, Mr. Buse said, is that some parents may be letting their children watch shows with S, V and L ratings while using the ratings as an opportunity to discuss sexual or violent scenes.

## Watching what kids watch

Kids 2-to-11 ratings (Total viewers kids 2 to 11)

Nielsen Media Research ratings for kids age 2 to 11 for five selected broadcast network series that have occasionally or frequently been given an S, L, V and/or D content rating. ABC, CBS and Fox implemented the revised ratings system beginning Oct. 1, 1997.

	Oct. 1-Nov. 19, 1996	Oct. 1-Nov. 16, 1997
"The Simpsons"	6.4 (2.5 million)	7.6 (3 million)
"Beverly Hills, 90210"	3.2 (1.2 million)	2.7 (1.1 million)
"Melrose Place"	2.8 (1.1 million)	2.3 (900,000)
"Everybody Loves Raymond"	1.9 (740,000)	2.0 (780,000)
"Ellen" (Season to date)	2.6 (1 million)	1.9 (730,000)
"NYPD Blue"	1.7 (660,000)	1.6 (630,000)

\*"Ellen" ran at 8 p.m. (ET) in fall 1996, when more kids are watching television, vs. at 9:30 p.m. in fall 1997.

In 1997, one kids 2-to-11 ratings point = 391,900 viewers. In 1996, one kids 2-to-11 ratings point = 388,900 viewers.

Source: Nielsen Media Research and ABC Research



Ratings for "The Simpsons," which is often given a V label, are up this year in the kids 2-to-11 demographic.

"Giving parents the information is a healthy thing for them," he said. "If only one parent out of 10 uses it, that's great."

To some degree, the networks are erring on the side of caution, adding labels even when they might not be necessary.

Even shows one wouldn't expect to be slapped with additional content ratings, such as "The Wonderful World of Disney" or "The Gregory Hines Show," have been given the new labels on occasion.

For the week ending Nov. 23, 12 out of the 15 prime-time programs aired on Fox contained some sort of additional content rating, ranging from a TV-PG-D for "King of the Hill" to a TV-14-S, L, V for "Melrose Place." At CBS, 10 out of 22 programs earned an additional content rating, such as a TV-PG-D for "The Nanny" and a TV-14-S, L, V for the miniseries "Bella Mafia."

ABC was the most lenient that week, giving five out of 17 entertainment programs a content label, including a TV-PG-D for "Drew Carey" and TV-14-L, S for "NYPD Blue."

## Err on side of caution

"I think the operating philosophy is, if you're going to err, err by being very cautious and conservative," said Roland McFarland, vice president, broadcast practices and standards, Fox. "I just got through working on 'Home Alone,' a holiday feature, which we packed with a PG. But it has some comedic violence, so we gave it a V as well."

Keeping the content ratings consistent has been a big challenge.

"That's the major failing of this system, there are no gradations," Mr. McFarland said.

"There's no sliding scale as far as severity. We wrestle with that all of the time. For example, what deserves an L rating? Is it a 'hell,' a 'damn,' is it six 'hells,' six 'damns'? Is it a time period concern? We're looking at every show episodically, weighing all of these factors," he said.

## Who cares?

So have viewers expressed confusion over the new, enhanced system?

"To be perfectly honest, we haven't had one response from our viewers regarding this whole system," Mr. McFarland said.

In response, Mr. Buse said: "That's because the public does not complain when they're content. We never get a letter from someone saying I'm taxed at the right rate."

Does the lack of viewer feedback suggest that parents don't care about the new ratings?

"I don't think it's right to assign that kind of apathy to America's parents. They do care," he said.#

# NBC brings new approach to wee hours

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plan.

But he acknowledged that the overnight time period presented an opportunity.

"As the lifestyles of the public change and there's a tremendous increase in available viewers in nontraditional times, it's important for networks to recognize that and try to provide programming there," Mr. Ohlmeyer said.

NBC also owns or partially owns several programs in prime time, but those series apparently aren't part of the overnight plan.

It was unclear whether the overnight programming block would be part of affiliates' clearance requirements.

NBC, like other networks, has been looking for ways to reuse its programming. Mr. Leno rarely takes vacations, which means that almost none of his original shows are rerun. Soap operas are also re-run infrequently.

Other than overnight, NBC's only other repurposing option would be to put the programming on cable, a move that antagonized affiliates when a "Late Night With Conan O'Brien" episode went on CNBC last year.

NBC officials discussed the plan with affiliates at last month's affiliate board of governors meeting in San Diego. Affiliates saw the proposal as interesting, but said they had bigger concerns to worry about.

It wasn't so long ago that early morning time periods were treated as an afterthought. Now, pre-dawn newscasts have become important revenue generators for stations.

Similarly, some affiliates said, there may be enough overnight viewers to generate a substantial revenue stream.

NBC sees an opportunity overnight because at that hour, entertainment alternatives are fairly weak, while there are numerous outlets offering news, including CBS and ABC.

"NBC Nightside" premiered in November 1991. It is produced continuously from 2 a.m. until 8:30 a.m. (ET) by NBC News Channel, the affiliate news service in Charlotte, N.C. Affiliates are asked to run 90 minutes of the newscast.

Affiliates said that "Nightside" is a profitable broadcast that offsets the expenses of operating the news service.

News Channel President Bob Horner said he was hopeful that if Mr. Ohlmeyer does move into overnight, there will still be time left over for the newscast: "I believe our intention is focused on making this a show that continues."

But apparently no one at NBC News is losing sleep over canceling "Nightside." The news division can put news on its MSNBC cable channel, which now uses taped material overnight.#

# Friedman to WCBS

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"They've carried on heroically," he said.

For another, CBS's prime-time schedule is attracting urban viewers for a change. A show like "Brooklyn South" is a hit in the New York market, he said.

That means the first place where Mr. Friedman will concentrate is the 11 p.m. news, hoping to take advantage of the network lead-in.

The station's fast-moving "More News in Less Time" format "will evolve" to be sure people are getting the information they need, he said.

"We are not coming in here to remake and redo everything," he said. "We're going to take windows of opportunity one at a time."

Another window he hopes to take advantage of is the crowd of viewers who'll be tuning in during February, when CBS covers the Winter Olympics from Nagano, Japan.

Mr. Friedman downplayed any suggestion he would be heir apparent as general manager if Mr. Klein is returned full time to his group duties.

"I have my hands full with the news and the promotion. I never really worry about the next job. I'm just happy to get back in the game," he said.

Mr. Friedman began his career in local news as a news writer at KNBC-TV, Los Angeles, in 1969. He became executive producer of "Today" in 1979. After stints as executive producer of "NBC Nightly News" and executive in charge of "Dateline," he returned to "Today" from 1990 to 1993.

He left NBC in 1993 and joined Savoy Pictures, developing programming for its television unit, until its TV stations were sold to Barry Diller's HSN Inc. last year.#