Online Services

CBS joins America Online, talking with Microsoft

Broadcaster expands online distribution; its priority is the Internet

By Mark Berniker

CBS has struck a deal with America Online to bring the network's content to the growing commercial online service.

America Online already carries on its service a well-developed area from Capital Cities/ABC and recently ended its relationship with NBC, which opted to be part of The Microsoft Network. CBS is in talks with The Microsoft Network to supply information about its programing to the new online service, scheduled to debut in August.

George Schweitzer, CBS Television Network executive vice president, marketing and communications, says CBS is interested in expanding the number of sites by which online users can access information about the network.

CBS had an exclusive deal with Prodigy, but when talks broke down to renew that agreement Schweitzer looked at his online options.

CBS's deal with America Online is an "open-ended financial arrangement" with the option to renew if both parties are pleased with the arrangement. Schweitzer says CBS will pursue a "non-exclusive online strategy."
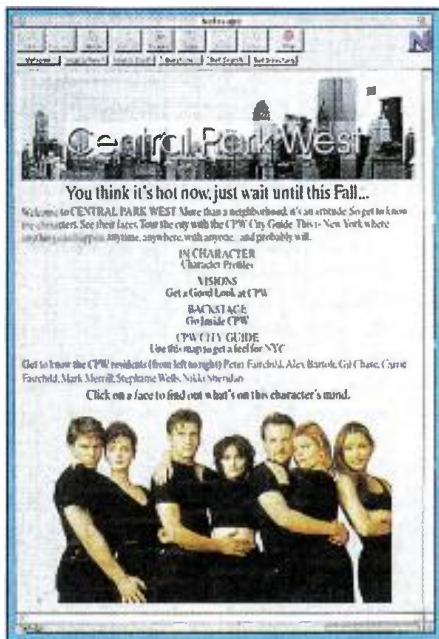
The CBS deal gives a boost to America Online's bid to become the leading source of online information about television and other main-

stream media. But there continues to be competition from Prodigy, CompuServe and The Microsoft Network, not to mention the Internet.

"The Internet is obviously our biggest area," says Schweitzer, who claims that CBS has 1.2 million "hits," or visits to its Internet site, per week.

Schweitzer says CBS is interested in attracting a "younger, media-savvy upscale audience" to the network and will promote its fall programing

lineup online, including areas dedicated to new shows *Central Park West, American Gothic* and *Dweebs.*

Schweitzer sees online as a "value-added extension to the media buy" and describes online advertising as a "developing territory."

One problem with advertising on the Internet is that there are no standardized measurement tools, which are needed for accountability and to establish rates. Several companies are developing software tools to measure online exposure to advertising. "We're looking at all of them, but there is not one standard measurement system," Schweitzer says.

Some online publishers already are charging clients Internet advertising rates for exposure to their sites. Time Inc.'s Pathfinder and *Wired* magazine's HotWired sites are among those that already have advertisers paying for space on Internet sites.

Sources say advertisers are paying roughly $10,000 per month for an ad on the Internet. Zima, AT&T, MCI and Tower Records are among the companies already buying ad space. **TM**

California to open phone competition

California regulators say they plan to open the market to local phone competition by January. Beginning next year, cable and other companies will be allowed to challenge Pacific Telesis Group and GTE Corp. for local phone services. AT&T, MCI, Sprint and Time Warner Cable are expected to compete in the California local phone market.

Saban plans 'Power Rangers' CD-ROMs

Saban Interactive, a division of Saban Children's Entertainment Group, will introduce five CD-ROMs based on its *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* show. Saban signed an exclusive distribution agreement with Activision Inc. The five titles include *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers Coloring Book, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers Jigsaw Puzzles, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers Print Kit, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers Screen Saver* and *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Movie Adventure.* The titles will be priced under $20 and will be available by Christmas.

Nielsen going online with ECN

Nielsen Media Research has created an online service within Entertainment Communications Network (ECN). Nielsen Online will display information on top programs in broadcast network, syndication, cable and Hispanic television as well as a National Data Historical Archive and Hot News & Ratings information. Users of ECN software can access Nielsen Online for free.

Interactive TV developer series set

Sybase will sponsor a series of interactive television developer seminars with Hewlett-Packard, PowerTV and Scientific-Atlanta. The New Media Partners Developers College will teach software developers and television producers how to build interactive TV applications. The seminars will be backed by an interactive television development kit, including HP's MediaStream video server, Scientific-Atlanta's digital home communication terminal, PowerTV's operating system development environment and Sybase's Intermedia software products. For information: (415) 943-8236.