

nel. ave initiated co-production efforts.

Ted Turner's cable superstation WTBS(TV) Atlanta has "dabbled" in co-productions over the years, said Robert Wussler, senior executive vice president. Turner Broadcasting System, but is now looking more seriously at its potential with the company's new cable channel, Turner Network Television, which launched in the U.S. last week. Wussler, however, does not see co-produced material as "the be-all and end-all" of the cable channel's program needs.

A key sector that now appears to be gaining interest in program co-ventures is the Hollywood majors. Slow to enter the new business, the studios are generally believed loathe to give up program rights, or to undermine their worldwide distribution network or West Coast production facilities. Their size also makes them more able than smaller producers to sustain production deficits.

Some studios, however, have cast an interested eye on the new approach. Among them is Paramount, which last winter struck a joint venture-co-production deal with Paris-based *Smurfs* producer Revcom, and more recently commissioned the Australian production of its network series *Dolphin Bay* (also, the company's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is being produced in Canada to help reduce production costs). MCA also has had its first serious discussions on mini-series co-production.

"There is a certain resistance to change" among studios, noted independent producer Michael Lepiner. "If you've had a goose that's laid a golden egg, you don't want to give in that goose." But, added Lepiner, "the goose is beginning to lay silver eggs. There is no longer a system in this country where networks or stations can afford to produce shows."

Outside the U.S., meanwhile, the expansion of European and other domestic markets has pressed producers to seek co-venture relationships to build product not only for their own domestic libraries but to strengthen their distribution arms with product to sell to the still highly lucrative U.S. market.

Among the most active have been British producers in the UK commercial television sector, including such companies as Granada TV, Television South, Central, Thames TV and London Weekend TV, as well as continental European production companies such as Silvio Berlusconi's Reteltalia.

Granada TV International Chief Executive Vivien Wallace explained that for her company, the last 18 months have seen a growing willingness to consider presales and prefinancing.

Previously, international sales were "mere icing on the cake" of the British monopoly commercial system, but with the surge of independent producers in the UK and increasing access to the national commercial network schedule by regional broadcasters, Granada's production output must seek other outlets or shrink to meet lesser domestic demand, she indicated.

U.S. producer Gershman, whose consortium of international producers includes UK's Central, Italian state broadcaster RAI, NDR in West Germany, Mexico's Univisa

and Canada's Global, pointed out that an inability to tap into the U.S. market is extremely limiting to a project's revenue potential.

Telecom's Lepiner saw it slightly differently. "The U.S. is the largest and most significant market, but it is one of many. It is no longer the single driving force." Two Telecom mini-series put together through a European consortium, the Emmy Award-winning *The Hiding of Anne Frank* and last season's *Anastasia*, would not have been profitable if not sold around the world, said Lepiner.

"We would not have produced them for the U.S.," said Lepiner. "Neither show could have been produced for the U.S. had they not been sold on a worldwide basis, because none of the U.S. networks could nearly afford the production price of the show."

As U.S. and offshore partnerships continue to blossom, some critical elements of the formula remain undetermined—the form of the co-ventures and the form and type of program produced from it. Producers, for instance, have yet to determine what is the most appropriate co-venture agreement, or even if there is one. The variations, according to Fred Cohen of independent producer Sunbow, include any combination of distribution guarantees, license fees and production facilities agreements. Creative involvement through story origination and development or through sharing of on-

screen and off-screen talent adds yet another layer of complexity.

The presale, in which the producer elicits an agreement to sell the product in a particular territory, is the simplest, but still leaves elements of financial risk for the producer and uncertainty for the buyer over whether the product will translate well to his home audience. Creative co-ventures, on the other hand, may lead to conflicts in translating the concepts to the screen in a way that satisfies the cultural demands of all the partners' national audiences.

Also an open question is what types of programs are the best vehicles for co-ventures, whether long-form or series, dramas or documentaries. According to Don Taffner, documentaries, dramas and mini-series have a better chance of being co-produced than comedy and game shows that depend more on local flavor and so do not travel as well internationally. While Taffner believes there is a danger of national differences leaving a project in a kind of cultural limbo, he does see forces at work for the homogenization of international programing efforts, a process that may ease American minds, but leaves many Europeans anxious.

Although most foreign co-ventures have involved mini-series, there are signs that co-produced series are also in the works. At Viacom, for instance, Kananack said his company is contemplating co-produced series forms, while Lepiner's Telecom has been negotiating a network sale for a co-

Co-venture scorecard

Deal-making in the world of program co-ventures is on the rise as the concept attracts more and more participants from among the globe's program-makers and backers. The following is just a sampling of the most current efforts:

■ Producer Larry Gershman's World International Network (WIN) consortium, whose members include British, Italian, German, Mexican and Canadian television companies, is working on a new project for Turner Network Television. Tentatively titled *Night Breaker*, it will star Martin Sheen and son Emilio Estevez. WIN is also working on a \$7-million mini-series for CBS, part of the *AT&T Presents* series. The three- or four-hour project will be produced in conjunction with Telecom International, another independent producer.

■ Telecom is also producing a series of two-hour mysteries with the UK's Yorkshire TV and other non-U.S. partners. Telecom has also sold to CBS *The Pied Piper*, co-produced with a French partner and the UK's Granada TV.

■ Granada is working as well with the Italian Reteltalia and U.S. producer Harmony Gold on the Jack Higgins thriller *Confessional*. The British producer also has a TV movie in development with CBS and is in discussions on three other projects with the U.S. networks, including a series with a two-hour pilot and other mini-series. Granada is also co-producing a series of drama documentaries for Home Box Office and is in production with Robert Cooper Productions (Citadel) on *Murderers Among Us*, the story of Nazi hunter Simon Weisenthal.

■ HBO is working with another British commercial broadcaster, Television South, and Citadel on another made-for-cable movie, is in post-production on an Australian co-produced mini-series *A Dangerous Life*, and on a Zenith and BBC co-production on a Soviet KGB agent. HBO has other films in development with the BBC, Britain's Channel Four and Italian state broadcaster RAI.

■ Harmony Gold, whose co-production consortium includes Reteltalia, is looking at the possibilities of partnership with leading French network TF-1, after disputes over production budgets with French state production company SFP. Co-venture discussions are also being held with Soviet and Brazilian television.

■ Viacom has initiated several co-produced mini-series projects, starting with the Dick Francis novel, "The Danger," and tied to other mini-series deals soon to be announced.

■ Also talking with the Soviets on co-production are Charles Fries, which is looking at production on a Genghis Khan program, and Turner Broadcasting, which is developing mini-series *Zeus' Weapon* on CIA-KGB crime solving for a 1991 airing.