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Time-Warner, Channel 25 talking



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By **John Kiesewetter**
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Good news for *Buffy the Vampire* and *Star Trek* fans: Time Warner Cable and low-power UPN affiliate WBQC-TV (Channel 25) have been talking quietly about various ways for UPN to be added by the cable system.

The war isn't over yet, but at least negotiations have begun. Virgil Reed, president of the Cincinnati Time Warner cable division, and Elliott Block, owner and general manager of Channel 25, have met five times in the past week three weeks.

Time Warner has ignored Channel 25 for 10 years, because federal law does not require cable systems to carry low-power stations. Many Time Warner customers have requested Channel 25 since WB's popular *Buffy* switches to UPN on Oct. 2.

Channel 25 also next month will premiere *Enterprise*, UPN's new *Star Trek* series, and reruns of *Star Trek: Voyager*, *The X-Files* and *Profiler*.

Mr. Block has offered Time Warner permission to air eight hours a day (4 p.m.-midnight) for free on the basic level, in exchange for putting Channel 25 full-time on the digital tier.

Mr. Reed has balked at the proposal, saying that copyright fees for Channel 25's syndicated programming on the digital level would be prohibitive, Mr. Block says.

For the past year, Mr. Reed has said he only wants the two-hour nightly UPN prime-time lineup, not Channel 25's syndicated reruns or SEC and Big 10 sports packages. Channel 25's SEC football season kicks off at 12:30 p.m. Sept. 1 with the University of Kentucky playing the University of Louisville.

Time Warner wants to put UPN programming at night on one of the basic channels used for WCET-TV educational program during the day, and leased for infomercials at night.

Mr. Block has mixed feelings about the negotiations.

"It's encouraging because we hadn't talked in 10 years, and we've now spoken several times in the last three weeks. But I don't want to be a two-hour island on cable surrounded by infomercials," Mr. Block says.

"I know we'll bring value to his cable system. I guarantee you that we'll get him subscribers," says Mr. Block, whose channel is carried only on Northern Kentucky, Delhi Township and Lebanon cable systems.

Time is of the essence. Cable companies must notify customers about channel changes one month in advance — and the two-hour *Enterprise* premiere is scheduled for 8 p.m. Sept. 26.

"I'd like to see us make a deal. I think it's in everybody's best interest," Mr. Block says. "I think you'll be able to see *Buffy* (on cable) this fall."

Stay tuned.

Network news: While talks between CNN and CBS about sharing news resources have hit a snag, CNN has begun exploring ways to partner with ABC, says *The New York Times*.

The networks, faced with sluggish advertising sales, could save money by sharing camera crews, production facilities and some reporters around the globe.

The paper says talks with CBS are stuck on issues of control: Which network would assign CNN crews to stories?

Discussions between ABC and CNN have been labeled as "preliminary."

At the press tour last month, CBS News President Andrew Heyward said he was "guardedly pessimistic" about any kind of news-sharing deals.

"I don't think there's any scenario in which there would be a (total) merger. I know CNN and (parent) AOL Time Warner executives have said the same thing," he said.

"There are obvious areas where we and CNN complement (each other), both in terms of our abilities and our needs. At the same time, there are tremendous obstacles to doing anything together," he said.

Two peas: When CNN's Jeff Greenfield was asked at the press tour about the prospect of CNN merging news operations with another network, he couldn't resist poking fun at CBS anchor Dan Rather's goofy homespun sayings heard often on election night.

"I cannot wait to work with Rather," says the host of *Greenfield at Large* (10:30 p.m. weekdays), "so I can finally get to say that I'm more excited than two grasshoppers in a 10-gallon hat."

Postponed: *20/20* has postponed "The Truth about Dogs and Cats," a story that included a visit to Cincinnati Zoo.

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