

# **Broadcast/Cable Programming**

**STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES**

Second Edition

Susan Tyler Eastman  
Sydney W. Head  
Lewis Klein

# BROADCAST/CABLE PROGRAMMING

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*Strategies and Practices*

Second Edition

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PROGRAMMING

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## Preface

In the short time since the original edition of this book in 1981, the subject matter has evolved considerably. Cable television has expanded and developed new forms; satellite relays have stimulated radio networking and format syndication; public broadcasting has reorganized; and the process of broadcast deregulation has advanced. We therefore made the following changes in addition to updating industry strategies and specific program examples:

- We now devote a separate part of this book to *cable television*, adding entirely new chapters on the programming of cable systems, basic cable networks, premium services and local origination.
- We *regrouped the chapters*, placing together television chapters, cable chapters, radio chapters and public broadcasting chapters. This regrouping closely fits the structure of many programming courses and permits teachers to conveniently reorder whole parts.
- Deregulation rendered moot most of the material on regulation in the previous edition, leading us to *recast the entire introductory part* of this edition. We reduced three chapters to one which directly introduces the rest of the chapters.
- We added a *chapter on program and audience research* covering the procedures and vocabulary of ratings analysis for broadcasting and cable. It includes reproduced pages from a variety of ratings books.
- We added a *chapter on radio networks and format syndicators* to lead the section on radio programming, indicating the revitalized role of nationwide radio programming.
- We expanded the *group-ownership chapter into radio and cable* to show the role that multiple-system owners are now having on cable programming.
- The dramatic alterations in *national public radio and public television* led to a complete reworking of these chapters and the addition of two new contributors.

Despite these changes, we believe our fundamental approach to the subject of programming proved viable and so have retained much of the first edition. As we said in the preface to that edition, only on the most generalized level can one make statements about programmers and their functions that apply equally to all sorts of programming situations. We start with such generalizations because all types of broadcasting and cable ultimately share certain common attributes, no matter how diverse the surrounding circumstances. But the heart of our book is the testimony of actual practitioners in varied programming situations.

One caveat should be made at the outset: We do not attempt to evaluate programming except in the pragmatic sense that programmers themselves use—

its ability to attract targeted audiences. This approach does not mean that we discount the importance of program quality or absolve broadcasters from responsibility for taking quality into consideration. We feel, however, that there is sufficient critical literature available. Our task was to examine objectively how programming decisions are actually made, whatever the wider artistic or social implications of those decisions might be.

## ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

One of the more perplexing problems we faced at the start was the decision as to what we meant by programming and hence what types of program decision makers we should include. It was tempting, for example, to think in terms of program genres and therefore to seek out experts in such specializations as sports, news and feature film programming. We were also tempted to call upon specialists in the making of programs, such as the package producers responsible for fashioning most of the network television entertainment programming.

We needed some defining principle that would impose limits and logical coherence on the selection of authors and the subjects of the chapters. In the end, we decided that we should confine the book to situations in which program executives are responsible not only for choosing and shaping individual programs or program segments but also for organizing such separate program items into coherent program services. It is universally recognized that an important—in some situations even the most important—part of the broadcast programmer's job is *scheduling*. Significant though producing organizations are in the creative aspects of program making, such organizations have no responsibility for designing entire program services. Instead, they focus their energies on turning out specific program series, leaving it to broadcast and cable programmers to decide if, when and how to use these programs in designing the continuous sequences that constitute broadcast or cable services. We therefore selected authors that had responsibility for the design of entire network, station or cable services.

We divided the job of the programmer into three arenas—*evaluation*, *selection* and *scheduling*—and structured each chapter to take account of current strategies and practices in each arena. Therefore, although selection and scheduling strategies are introduced in Chapter 1, and ratings are covered in detail in Chapter 2, each following chapter shows how selection and scheduling strategies and ratings are used in its programming situations. These three content topics guide the organization of the individual chapters in Parts 2, 3, 4 and 5.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book divides into five major sections: Part 1 introduces the concepts and vocabulary for understanding the contexts of the remaining chapters; Parts 2, 3, 4 and 5 look at programming strategy for television, cable, radio and public broadcasting from the authors' perspectives as industry programming experts.

- Each *part* begins with a brief *overview*, relating the set of chapters to each other and the rest of the book.
- Each *chapter* is preceded by an *outline* of its headings and subheadings to provide a handy guide to its contents.
- A *summary* concludes each chapter, followed by *footnotes* and *selected reference sources*. The readings cite books, reports and trade publications that expand, support, complement or contrast with the subject of each chapter. These sources are annotated in the bibliography at the end of the book.
- An *afterword* closes the text—projecting some of the influences new technologies may have on the programming strategies in this book.
- A list of *abbreviations and acronyms* appears near the end of the book.
- Concepts and vocabulary pertaining to programming appear in the *glossary*.
- An *annotated bibliography* of books, articles, reports, guides, theses and dissertations on programming follows the glossary. References appearing in the footnotes are not repeated in the bibliography if they are highly topical or do not relate mainly to programming. For items on specific topics, readers should consult the *selected sources*, *chapter notes* and the *bibliography*.
- The *general index* at the end of the book is preceded by an *index of the movies and television and radio program titles* mentioned in the text.

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Susan Tyler Eastman

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## PART ONE

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# Programming Principles, Methods, Resources and Constraints

*Part I has a dual purpose. Chapters 1 and 2 provide concepts and vocabulary used in the rest of the book. Chapters 3 and 4 introduce broad perspectives that span the contents of two or more subsequent parts.*

*Chapter 1 introduces the major concepts and vocabulary of programming strategy, providing a **framework** for the individual chapters that follow. It lays the groundwork for conceptualizing the essential nature of the programming function. Despite the tremendous variety of programming situations that occurs in broadcasting and cable, all programmers face similar problems and approach them with similar strategies. Common principles, then, underlie programming behaviors that can be understood by examining the programmer's options. Some of the constraints operating on programming situations are beyond the programmer's immediate control. Others leave latitude for the exercise of the programmer's skills. This chapter spells out the wide range of skills a programmer needs and reports what programmers have said about the characteristics of the job of programming.*

*Chapter 2 introduces the major concepts of program and audience **research** crucial to understanding many of the strategies in the remainder of the book. Subsequent authors in this book draw on these concepts, assuming that the reader is familiar with them. This chapter describes the qualitative and quantitative research tools of broadcasting and cable, explains how they can be put to use and assesses their programming value. The author focuses on national and local market ratings because they are the industry's primary method of program evaluation, providing the major measures of success and failure and the means for setting advertising rates. Authors in the rest of the book, especially in Chapters 3, 5, 9 and 13, supplement the measurement tools introduced in this chapter by discussing more specialized data collection methods and by reviewing highly specialized research and ratings reports. Chapter 2, then, supplies the reader with a basic understanding of how the industry evaluates programs and audiences.*



Chapter 3 introduces the role of the station representative. A **rep programmer** works for one of about a half-dozen major station representative firms and brings a nationwide perspective to programming. Reps advise station and cable system programmers rather than program a station or service themselves. Of about two dozen national rep firms, only the largest have rep programmers. The firms help their clients because stations in dominant market positions are easy to sell to advertisers, the primary job of the rep firm. Rep programmers ensure that client stations' program schedules are salable, and they find national advertisers for some of the nationally distributed cable networks. In Chapter 3, the author also discusses many of the research reports that reps interpret and relay to their clients. Rep programmers concentrate on television station programming; they are less involved in radio programming, a more local activity. In the cable industry, group owners generally advise their owned systems on programming from a national perspective.

Chapter 4 covers **group ownership** of broadcasting stations and cable systems. Its content encompasses Parts II, III and IV on television, radio and cable. Group ownership refers to common ownership of two or more broadcasting stations or cable systems. There are over 150 group owners of television stations, averaging three stations each and including half of all television stations. Most of the nearly 10,000 commercial radio stations in the United States are owned by individuals or companies that own more than one radio station; many of them also own television stations or cable systems. And over 300 group owners of cable systems control from a few to hundreds of individual cable franchises, and often they also have interests in broadcasting. The author of Chapter 4 discusses the influence group ownership has on station and system programming.

The four chapters making up Part I, then, discuss programming strategies from broad perspectives. The authors of these chapters supply an overview of programming strategies and the tools to interpret the more specialized chapters in the rest of the book.