

PEOPLE

THE FIFTH ESTATER

The Big Picture

Myerson uses local, cable expertise to extend WB's reach

Russ Myerson has always seized opportunity. In high school, he discovered that the federal government had invested a half-million dollars in a program that allowed students to take college-prep classes in the morning and TV-production courses in the afternoon. "I would volunteer for telethons. I would volunteer to run cameras and audio for weeklong auctions," recalls Myerson, now executive vice president and general manager of The WB 100+. "If you could give me experience, I was there."

He transplanted that fierce work ethic to his first job, cameraman at KPLC Lake Charles, La., a small station near the Louisiana-Texas border.

"If you volunteered for something at the station, they would immediately take you up on it," he says. "It was like the best-paid internship in every department you could find. I was the only person on staff that didn't have an Acadian accent," he says, smiling, "so I immediately became an announcer. I was a consumer reporter for the morning show. I did cooking segments and helped produce."

Before long, Myerson had parlayed his fervor into a new job: program director. Four years later, in 1980, he was wooed away by WJKS Jacksonville, Fla.

That hands-on station experience, along with several years in the cable business, uniquely prepared Myerson to execute Jamie Kellner's concept for The WB 100+, says Dick Block, an independent TV consultant who has known Myerson since his Jacksonville days.

"There's nobody else in the world who could have done what Russ did," Block says. "He had a very difficult assignment. When I first heard about it, I thought it was another one of Jamie's crazy ideas, but Russ made it work."

What Herculean task did Myerson perform?

He created a network of computer servers that operate as TV stations. That technology al-

lows The WB to distribute its shows on cable systems via satellite in 100-plus broadcast markets—without having physical TV operations in place. In one fell swoop, The WB adds

9.5 million households to its distribution without waiting for stations to become affiliates. Although the "stations" are located at a central site in Los Angeles, they operate like local ones, running local ad spots and promotions.

"In tackling what is a pretty mammoth project—putting The WB in 112 markets with a local station—he views it as a general manager, not as someone who is operating out of Hollywood," says Garth Ancier, co-chairman of The WB. "He looks at it like he's an operator in each individual market."

Besides helping The WB gain distribution, The WB 100+ is a favorite of syndicators, which can clear their shows in half the U.S. with just a phone call. "It's been a real service to them," Myerson says. "We've fostered relationships with the syndication community and provided an environment in which their shows would flourish."

This past year, The WB 100+ became the home of Warner Bros.' *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, a valuable asset for the group.

Even though Myerson has spent most of his career in TV, from 1994 to '97, he launched Game Show Network (now called GSN) for Sony Pictures Entertainment. That task also required entrepreneurial expertise, as well as technological know-how. "Right when TV became digital, we created the world's first serial digital cable network," he says. "It was quite a learning curve. But becoming facile in digital TV was a joy."

Says Vincent Grasso, COO of Primedia Software, "He understands every facet of TV production, advertising, and management. He's a forward thinker. Russ is one of the best combinations of renaissance men in television."—Paige Albinak

Russell Harris Myerson

Executive vice president and general manager, The WB 100+



B. Sept. 16, 1955, St. Petersburg, Fla.

EDUCATION

BA, communications with a minor in business, Loyola University, New Orleans, 1976

EMPLOYMENT

Program director, KPLC, Lake Charles, La., 1976-80; head of programming and operations, WJKS, Jacksonville, Fla.; 1980-88; director of programming, Media General Broadcast Group, Tampa, Fla., 1988-94; chairman of the board and chief executive officer, National Association of Television Programming Executives, Los Angeles, 1994; senior vice president of operations, Sony Pictures Entertainment's Game Show Network, Los Angeles, 1994-97; current position since 1997

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