

PROFILE: RUSSELL MYERSON

From Kit to Cable

Station Group Leader Transformed Childhood Fascination into Career

By Jennifer Pendleton*Special to TelevisionWeek*

As a schoolboy in St. Petersburg, Fla., Russell Myerson purchased a kit from RadioShack full of components to build a rudimentary radio transmitter. After he assembled the transmitter Mr. Myerson became a disc jockey, spinning top 40 records for his family to hear on the radio at home. Soon his ambitions mushroomed: What if he plugged that same equipment into the clothesline? You guessed it. Mr. Myerson found a way to jigger the wires so he could transmit his musical program to the neighborhood.

There were other indications that Mr. Myerson possessed

more than a childhood interest in broadcasting. Each summer, on visits to New York with his physician father, homemaker mother and two siblings, the teenage Mr. Myerson took in the NBC tour at Rockefeller Center. Fascinated, he started reading television industry trade publications. Eventually the precocious lad could outwit NBC's tour guides, pointing out errors in their presentations.

Today, after more than 20 years in broadcasting and cable, Mr. Myerson still believes in pushing the limits of existing technology to achieve professional goals and remains a walking encyclopedia of television (though he no longer has the inclination to point out flaws in network tours). He's executive VP and general manager of The WB's 100+ Station Group, the cable-delivered entity affiliated with the youth-skewing network.

It's a job the now 48-year-old Mr. Myerson took six years ago. At the time, The WB's 100+ Station Group was a figment of WB chief Jamie Kellner's imagination. Despite a shortage of available stations in broadcast markets ranked 100 to 210, a determined Mr. Kellner believed that somehow, The WB could establish itself in America's small to medium communities.

Eventually, a solution would emerge by way of then-new technology capable of delivering The WB (and elements of local broadcast) through cable pipes. But in 1997, when Mr. Myerson arrived, such technology didn't exist. The WB also hadn't yet set up the elaborate web of relationships with technology companies, local stations and cable operators necessary to fulfill its dreams.

"Jamie Kellner gives you the concept, and you do what you need to do and get it done," Mr. Myerson said, summarizing his 1997 marching orders. But he conceded, "It was a challenge at every level. ... We were doing something that had never been done before."

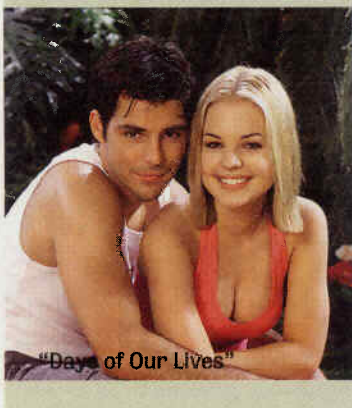
Mr. Myerson possessed a rare



100+ STATION GROUP CHIEF Russell Myerson has always tried to push the limits of technology.

STATS

Name: Russell H. Myerson
Date of Birth: Sept. 16, 1955
Birthplace: St. Petersburg, Fla.
Start date at The WB 100+ Station Group: Aug. 1, 1997
Who knew? Mr. Myerson has been an ardent fan of the long-running NBC soap opera "Days of Our Lives" since the 1960s. Yes, of course, the executive has a packed schedule, so he doesn't have the luxury of tuning in to observe those "sands through the hourglass" every day. But that's what TiVo and ReplayTV are for, said Mr. Myerson, who screens his favorite soap in the evening and on weekends, as time allows.



combination of cable and broadcast experience, plus an entrepreneur's zeal for risk taking and dedication to hard work. Mr. Myerson had been senior VP of operations for Sony Pictures Entertainment's cable Game Show Network during its start-

La., put Mr. Myerson's enthusiasm for regional cuisine to use, making him on-air cooking segment host.

His dedication led to positions in larger markets and eventually his relocation to the West Coast with Sony. Today

a five-frame mural depicting the medium's classic characters, including Lucille Ball, Howdy Doody and Roseanne Barr; it's modest in size, by Hollywood standards. He arrives each day at 6:15 a.m., fielding calls to and from the hundreds of executives in his coast-to-coast enterprise.

At his level, Mr. Myerson is surprisingly hands-on, spending around half of his time on the road. Vic Veters, general manager of WKTV and WBU-TV in Utica, N.Y., said Mr. Myerson has visited probably five times since 1998. He's participated in sales presentations to local advertisers and broken bread at local Italian restaurants with Mr. Veters and others.

"It speaks to the passion he has for what he does for a living," Mr. Veters said of the personal attention he and others receive.

That it does, for Mr. Myerson still claims to hold an unabashed love of the business, despite the loneliness of frequent travel and little free time. "My hobby is also my profession," he said. "Most of my weekends are spent watching television." ■

“[Establishing the WB 100+ Station Group] was a challenge at every level ... We were doing something that had never been done before.”

Russell Myerson, executive VP and general manager, The WB 100+ Station Group

up phase, creating Sony's first all-digital television facility in the United States in 1994 (Liberty Media is now Sony's partner on GSN). Before that he'd held production and scheduling jobs at small television stations, one so strapped Mr. Myerson would pinch hit as set painter, on-air reporter and live telethon producer. KPLC-TV in Lake Charles,

under Mr. Myerson's leadership, the WB 100+ Station Group has 109 stations around the country, reaching 9 million households. He oversees a staff of 60 at headquarters in Burbank, Calif., near the Warner Bros. back lot. "I want people who are self-starters," he said.

Mr. Myerson runs his operation in an office decorated with