



WBTD won the off-net syndication rights to NBC Studios' *'Will & Grace.'*

WB has real 'Will' power

By Melissa Grego

As the NATPE convention nears, syndicators are firming up their syndication plans.

In one of the most highly anticipated deals, Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution nabbed the rights to the off-net syndication run of NBC Studios *Will & Grace*, and will be bringing the show to NATPE in preparation for a fall 2002 launch.

The stars of *Will & Grace*, Eric McCormack and Debra Messing, are already scheduled to appear in New Orleans for the convention as hosts of the Hollywood Radio and Television society's International Broadcasting Awards.

NBC Enterprises, the distributor for NBC Studios, has been shopping the show around to syndicators for several months, sources say. NBC does not have its own domestic syndication arm.

WBTD has handled the off-net runs of NBC programs before. WBTD launched the off-net syndication run of NBC Studios' *In the House* in September, as well as that of NBC's *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* in 1994.

The two companies also currently work together in the first-run arena, with syndicated magazine *Access Hollywood*. WBTD handles station sales and marketing for the show, while NBC produces. ■

CLOSED CIRCUIT

BEHIND THE SCENES, BEFORE THE FACT

LOS ANGELES

Dumping Diva

Video-on-demand hardware maker Diva Systems was evicted from *TV Guide's* booth on the floor of the Western Show in Los Angeles last week. Diva was demonstrating its system in several companies' booths, showing how subscribers could instantly call up whatever movie they want. The demo was using *TV Guide Interactive* as a program guide, so had set up in a corner of the company's booth. But on Wednesday, Diva announced that it was developing its own electronic program guide. Oops. When Diva's demonstrator showed up the next day, *TV Guiders* shut down the Diva equipment and told the demonstrator to leave.

NEW YORK

Glint in the Eye

For several years, CBS has had the image of being the most affiliate-friendly network, but station sources say it is playing hardest ball on network compensation. Sources say all of CBS' negotiations on the issue start out the same way: zero comp. "That's not where they are ending up in many cases," says one executive. "But NBC and ABC are saying, 'we need to get this down to reasonable levels.'" ABC recently did a new five-station deal with Benedek Broadcasting in which the broadcaster took a comp cut, Jim Yeager, company president, confirms. He wouldn't reveal how much, saying, "under the circumstances, we're happy with the deal." Word has it that Quincy Broadcasting was forced to take a huge cut in comp by NBC. But even at CBS, affiliate sources say stations that perform well in the ratings do have some leverage. The only comment Peter Schruth, CBS head of affiliate relations, has on comp talks is that stations should, "be prepared to negotiate."

Opening up?

Donaldson Lufkin Jenrette stirred up a hornet's nest two weeks ago when it excluded the press from its first annual media conference, which it scheduled in direct competition with the decades-old PaineWebber Media Conference in New York. Dow Jones withdrew and *The New York Times* said it wouldn't participate in the future unless DLJ opened it up. And it appears DLJ will do just that. According to executives who participated in the DLJ conference, next year's event will be open. "Right now, they're talking about letting reporters into an adjoining room to listen to the speakers," said one executive. DLJ public relations staffers didn't return calls.

WASHINGTON

Narrowcasting

Broadcasters are looking at a new technology that will allow digital TV stations to air different versions of programming within the same channel. For example, a station could air one version of the local news for Maryland's Prince George's County and another for neighboring Montgomery County; or it could run Cadillac ads during sporting events in upscale areas and Chevrolet ads in less-wealthy areas. An ATSC subcommittee is mailing ballots to its members asking them to vote on whether the standards-setting association should start looking at the issue, called "directed channel change."

All business, of course

One of FCC Chairman Bill Kennard's requests at the Western Cable Show was a private audience with singer Bonnie Raitt, who performed at the convention. Kennard told California Cable Television Association executives he wanted to discuss some issues Raitt had related to a low-power TV station in which she has invested. "She's probably never heard that one before," quipped one industry executive. No word on whether Kennard got his wish.