

# Viacom's 'Real Time' tackles access

*News/entertainment strip will be produced by MTV*

By Joe Flint

**A**n already crowded 1994 prime access battlefield got bigger last week with Viacom's entry, the entertainment-strip *Real Time*.

The MTV-type news/entertainment show is aimed primarily at the 7-8 p.m. time slot and the 18-49 and 25-54 demos.

Viacom is offering the show on a cash-plus-barter basis with one minute of national time available. There will also be a sixth-day, hour-long weekend version of the show.

*Real Time* marks Viacom's first attempt to bring the cable success of subsidiary MTV to broadcast television. The series will be produced by MTV Productions. MTV News Vice President Linda Corradina has been named executive producer, and other MTV News producers and on-air talent, including model Cindy Crawford, will be seen on *Real Time*.

Despite the cable connection, there will be no cable window for *Real Time*, say Viacom executives.

Viacom describes the program as a daily entertainment and lifestyle magazine that hopes to "cut through the hype that surrounds showbiz to tell viewers about the latest in movies, television and music."

It won't be just hype that *Real Time* has to cut through. Time Warner is already pitching stations on its *Entertainment News Television*, while MCA TV has its own news magazine in the works (see story, page 20). King World is hoping to pair its *American Journal* with *Hard Copy*; Twentieth TV has *Sparks*, and Buena Vista Television is hoping to strip its magazine show *The Crusaders* if it does well as a weekly this year.

"We are hoping that stations will buy the show for prime access. We have flexibility, but we're shooting for prime."

"Even though there is another show out there, we can't lose sight of the fact that there are a lot of opportunities," says Rick Jacobson, president, domestic markets, Viacom Entertainment.

Station reps say that, at least for the first year, *Real Time* may find itself on



'Real Time' co-anchor Yolanda Gaskins

late fringe on many stations.

"As has always been the case, any new show fighting in a crowded field will likely have to launch in late fringe. It was the same for *A Current Affair*, *Hard Copy* and now *American Journal*," says one rep source.

During the next year, even late fringe won't be as big an option for new product. Fox and CBS have their own entries in the time period.

"It's difficult for any syndicator to get a foothold," says one rep, adding that they "did it to themselves somewhat with all the talk shows, many of which run an hour and are on in late night."

Although Viacom may hope to

make inroads against such tabloid shows as *A Current Affair* and *Hard Copy*, it is not limiting itself to network affiliates for clearances.

That may help. For independents, first-run is a cheaper investment than the off-network sitcoms that usually air in prime access. The stations also don't have to make as big a commitment in terms of how many years they'll carry the show, says Janeen Bjork, vice president, programming, Seltel Inc.

*Real Time* will be anchored by Yolanda Gaskins, a former entertainment reporter for CNN, E! and BET, and Steven Walker, an environmental reporter at KOMO-TV Seattle. ■

## ITC targets production for cable

ITC Entertainment Group, hoping to exploit the growth of cable networks and their need for original programming, has hired veteran producer Les Haber to lead the company's expansion into original programming production for basic and pay cable.

Haber's mandate, according to ITC President and Chief Executive Officer Jules Haimovitz, is to find new cable buyers for ITC's library, mainly television movies and specials as well as feature films.

The company's decision to expand further into cable not only demonstrates the growth of cable as an outlet for original programming and library product, but also indicates the diminishing need for such product on broadcast TV. With more stations buying first-run product through the Prime Time Entertainment Network and other sources, movie packages, made-for-TV movies and miniseries are a thing of the past for many stations.

—JF