

part of the lost revenue from reduced compensation," says Jeff Rosser, general manager, KDFW-TV Dallas. The station launched a two-hour local news block in early May (8-10 a.m.). To make room, the station canceled an hour of the CBS cartoon block, and shifted another to 6 a.m.

Rosser says the station analyzed the efforts of other affiliates around the country and found "nearly all of them are enjoying real success." So far, the KDFW-TV Saturday news block leads its time period with, on average, about a 6 rating. "We've found an untapped resource of advertising revenue," he says.

Last month the CBS affiliate in Utah, KSL-TV, launched a three-and-a-half-hour Saturday newscast (7-10:30 a.m.). The station's news director, Lee Roderick, says a station survey concluded there was an underserved Saturday news audience. "That survey, coupled with the success other stations were having, and all the inventory we recaptured—we just felt the reasons were too compelling not to go forward," says Roderick.

Not unexpectedly, network officials are not terribly pleased with the emerging trend, station officials say,

although there doesn't appear to be much they can do about it. CBS officials declined comment for this story. But one network source said the trend is one more headache for all three networks: "Saturday morning is a profitable daypart for the networks. It's going to be a problem for us."

But affiliates have their own problems. "We value the relationship with the network," says Roderick. "But we have other things we have to consider as well."

Rosser and Roderick both say they were expecting an avalanche of angry calls and letters from outraged parents upset that the stations would cancel their children's favorite cartoons. "To our delight, there was just a small handful of complaints," says Roderick. "We're still getting a lot of calls thanking us for putting the news on."

"It's been received well," says Rosser, "with the exception of some parents unhappy that we took off their kid's favorite cartoon."

In Seattle, KIRO-TV and NBC affiliate KING-TV launched Saturday morning news blocks in September 1991 and now split about 9 rating points between them. "There's a big appetite for local news and targeted informa-

tion programs," says Glenn Wright, general manager, KIRO-TV. A locally produced garden magazine, says Wright, will be sold to six other stations in the region this year. "We want to do a video library with the show, and possibly the travel and cooking shows as well," he says.

At KIRO-TV, it's not just network fare that is being pre-empted. Wright says the station did not renew *Donahue* or *Sally Jessy Raphael* for fall 1993 and plans to fill one of those hours with a locally produced show. "That's the direction we'll continue to head in," he says.

WBAL-TV will launch a four-hour Saturday newscast on July 18. "We feel there's a terrific underserved audience," says station general manager Phil Stolz. "Many people in the market have no cable and no local news at all on Saturday."

Stolz, for one, insists the current battle between CBS and its affiliates over compensation has nothing to do with the station's decision. "We were planning this months before that issue came up," he says. "It's just a good opportunity, and I think more and more stations will find an appetite for news on the weekends." ■

GRANITE TELEVISION STATIONS PLAN TELCO ENTRY

Will television viewers pay extra to have instant access, by telephone, to a station's latest sports update or community calendar of events? Are there opportunities for advertisers to tie in to such a phone-based service, known as "audiotext"? The answers are unknown, but Granite Broadcasting Corp., New York, and Audio Communications Inc., Las Vegas, have formed a joint venture to test and market the feasibility of such services.

Newspapers have dabbled in such services for years, offering readers the opportunity, for example, to call a 900-number for sports scores, stock quotes or a couple of clues to the daily crossword puzzle.

From Granite's point of view, the potential of audiotext is a marketing and promotion opportunity that could lead to additional revenues, from both viewers calling in and advertisers.

The potential for ACI, an 800-number and 900-number software packager, is a pilot program that it could market to broadcasters around the country, according to Alan Zaretsky, ACI director of sales and marketing.

According to both Zaretsky and Granite Chairman Don Cornwell, their venture represents the first major effort by a broadcaster to test the potential of audiotext.

"It's really a marketing and promotion-oriented

project for us," says Cornwell. "Increasingly, all the electronic boxes we use in our homes are becoming melded together. And as broadcasters, we have the ability to motivate people to do things. We have large audiences and can drive people to use a service. If they don't like it, they won't use it again."

In the past, some 900-number services, particularly those advertised on television, have been linked to goofy or sordid schemes designed simply to run up phone bills. "We won't be doing any of that," says Cornwell. "Our managers have to live in their communities."

Each of Granite's four network affiliates (WEEK-TV Peoria, Ill.; KBJR-TV Duluth, Minn.; WPTA-TV Fort Wayne, Ind., and KNTV[TV] San Jose, Calif.) will have a customized audiotext software package tailored to community needs, says Cornwell. The stations will go on-line one at a time starting in the fall.

Cornwell provided an example of how the service could tie in advertisers. "You might do an Easter Seal campaign where viewers call a 900-number to make a donation and in return receive a coupon book sponsored by local businessmen." The service could also do opinion polls and surveys, he says. "We're testing the power of TV. We believe broadcasters ought to reach out and be in more channels of distribution." ■