



**Harry Pappas, Pappas Telecasting, puts much stress on the "marketing" aspect of selling on his KPTM Omaha station. "We're not selling spots. We're helping advertisers use TV."**

went on the air September 19, 1982 and was "operationally profitable in its first full broadcast year." So says Albert M. Holtz, president of Meridian Communications, who also owns WRGT-TV Dayton. He gives three reasons for the station's success, two of them related to the ADI's mountainous terrain.

First, an important decision, "though expensive," was a "strong physical plant." That meant 5 Megawatts of radiated power, including a 110-kilowatt transmitter, and a tall tower.

Second, "We became cable friendly." Holtz jolted the West Virginia Cable Television Association by asking to join and to address its convention. He became an associate member, promoted his station to his fellow members and was described as the first broadcaster who ever attempted to be part of the organization. There were a few major battles over must-carry and it took time to achieve the level of carriage eventually achieved. But WVAH-TV is now on 325 systems.

Third, management decisions. "We made no mistakes." Holtz says the station was capitalized correctly, promoted properly and bought the best programs it could afford.

The Meridian chief pointed out, however, that the station watches program expenses carefully. "We have never gone over 30% of our expenses for programming." As the only indie in the market—other than a religious station licensed to Ashland, Ky.—it was the

only customer for many programs, however. "We have a lot of clout," Holtz admits. "We looked for sweet-heart deals, taking product they couldn't place with promises of favorable deals later. A lot of syndicators were good to us, but now it's not like that."

The station's best daypart is weekend daytime, "the Achilles heel of affiliates." The station is strong from 12-6 p.m. Saturday and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday, Holtz explains, with a schedule of basically movies.

In the sales area, "We built up the market tremendously," says Holtz, the station employing a sales staff double that of any affiliate. At the end of this month there will be a closing, however, with both Meridian stations turned over to Norman Lear's Act III Communications. The pair are returning over 1200% on equity to their investors, of whom Holtz is one.

### Keep it lean

There's more than one way to skin a cat and James Lavenstein feels he knows how. The general manager (and general partner) of KOKI-TV Tulsa, the 54th ADI, says, "The less you go in with, the sooner you get in the black." KOKI-TV is the only commercial indie with an overall November Arbitron viewing share out of three in the market. It scored a 6 share in the November Arbitron, the same as the year before.

KOKI-TV went on the air October 24, 1980, and made a profit in the fourth quarter of its second year. It's been profitable ever since.

Lavenstein recalls, "We went on the air with used equipment, old furniture and a low-rent building and we still operate the same way." Because of the oil slump, revenues of the station have also slumped—"but not profit, because expenses are not that high."

Lavenstein didn't try to compete for programming. The station started with such shows as *Perry Mason*, *Rawhide*, *Maverick*, *Emergency*, *I Love Lucy*, *The Flying Nun*, etc. Currently, in the 5-7 p.m. daypart, Lavenstein is using hours, rotating shows such as *Little House*, *Dukes of Hazzard*, *Star Trek* and *Big Valley*. At night, it's movies back-to-back from 7 to 11 p.m. For kids, there are cartoons from 7-9 a.m. and 3-5 p.m.

Lavenstein points out, in explaining the effectiveness of his oldie programming, that his audience skews to older demos and that he covers a large rural population. "This stuff is ageless," he insists.

As for ad sales, Lavenstein notes that he pays the highest sales commission in the market. He maintains that he gets

the best sales people and gives them lots of program information. "We go out of our way to find lean, hungry, very ambitious people." The KOKI-TV chief notes that for the most part the sales people are recruited from radio stations.

In contrast to KOKI-TV, Pappas Telecasting's KPTM(TV) Omaha is riding first class. It seems to pay. The station signed on April 6, 1986 and in a recent press release it was able to boast that, according to Nielsen figures covering 182 independents in November, it's the third highest-rated indie in the U.S. with a 12 share. The latest Arbitron sweep study gave the station, the only indie in the market, an 11 share.

Harry Pappas, the president of Pappas Telecasting, owner of three indies, says the success of an independent depends on "an aggregate of fundamentals, well attended to." Here again, that means classy, state-of-the-art hardware: 5 Megawatts of ERP backed by 240 kilowatts of brute transmitter power (with stereo), a tower 1,500 feet tall where the competition's is 1,200 feet, the "finest" studio equipment, including a control room which can be run by one person, computer-aided editing equipment, Betacam and one-inch recorders, etc.

The station's capital budget, says Pappas, is 50-70% above average, which he puts at \$5-7 million. Pappas is spending \$10-12 million, but, he says, the station was profitable (on an oper-

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**Frank X. Tuoti, KMSB-TV Tucson, believes that the Fox network is the future of independent TV. "When we buy a show and it dies, we're stuck with it. When a Fox show dies, it replaces it."**