



# is television too

By Julian Gross

In this special article, a uhf station operator sets out to clear up what he believes is distorted thinking about television service in the high bands. The essence of his argument is that as far as viewers care, uhf and vhf are indistinguishable.

IN the year since FCC started granting permits for commercial television stations in the new uhf band a torrent of words has been written about uhf. Some sound and accurate information has appeared, but an overwhelming amount of misleading and inaccurate stuff has also appeared, and this has confused the picture, not only in the mind of the public, but in a good many sections of the industry itself as well.

As a uhf operator, I feel that it is time that this branch of the industry cleared up these distortions and inaccuracies, analyzed the progress of uhf to date, and presented a clear, comprehensive picture to the world in general.

Ultra high frequency television made its debut amidst conflicting opinions throughout the industry on the possible acceptance by the viewer who had to convert his existing vhf set; among the engineers who doubted the effectiveness of the uhf signal and estimated a maximum coverage area of 15 miles, and among programming experts who felt that the new uhf stations would not be able to obtain a sufficiently high caliber of program to carry a sizable audience.

It's very important to remember that vhf and uhf are both *television!* Vhf was here first, but its frequencies limited it to only a few areas in the United States. Uhf is removing those limitations and opening up a great new era for television—the most powerful, attention-compelling, interest-sustaining communication vehicle yet created.

But whether we talk about uhf or vhf, it is, first and foremost, *television.* Vhf is the older brother, but uhf is catching up fast. Of course there are problems—but they are not problems peculiar to uhf, and they are only a fraction of the problems that confronted vhf only a few years ago. The younger brother, uhf, has some pretty big advantages and these advantages will assert themselves in due time.

One of the foremost problems requiring full recognition by all uhf stations is the justification for the purchase of these new market operations by the advertising agency. The agency media department cannot arbitrarily place schedules with a station unless the purchase represents a sound buy for the client. The new uhf market, during this period of rapid growth, must accept the obligation to provide accurate, detailed an-

swers to the problems that confront the media buyer.

The agencies must be shown the growth of the uhf audience within the market area with figures that can be relied on as completely accurate. In cases of previously established competitive stations or overlap from outside stations, the new station's research should show the change in viewing habits, or the change in previous projections of impact from the outside station on the local market. With the advent of many new TV markets, most agencies are becoming increasingly conscious of cost per thousand, and in those many markets where such costs are well within a typical yardstick of \$2 per thousand homes per commercial minute, this information is of utmost importance in the final agency decision. Set penetration figures can be completely erroneous if based on an area far in excess of either the station's coverage or the major market. Studies by the station in this respect can frequently increase a penetration figure from 12 to 15% to three or four times that figure.

#### Coverage Claims

In some cases the practice has grown out of necessity (by reason of a limited number of stations) to try to obtain coverage of a widespread area that includes several important markets from a single station. As new stations develop in the individual markets, the agency buyer should be informed of the individual habits and characteristics of market, the relationship of the station programming to the community needs, and the local loyalties that develop by reason of the community services rendered by the new station. Ultimately, this situation may result in a general overhaul of rate structure among existing stations as some operations lose their exclusivity and dominance and new stations increase in popularity. However, this will represent a natural and healthy development for the entire industry.

The idea of merchandising assistance for the national advertiser should not be brushed aside by the new station as an unnecessary extra. Once again, we must realize that the era of the limited station monopoly is over, and practices that were established during that period will not necessarily hold up in the new competitive picture. All television stations, uhf or vhf,

must accept the thinking that their role is to promote the sale of merchandise to the consumer, and any assistance that they are in a position to give should be part of its basic service.

The agency media personnel are not opposed to uhf. On the contrary, more and more business, from more and more agencies, is being placed daily on uhf stations. In many instances the far-sighted buyers can recognize the potential for some of the new stations and have made a wise investment for their clients even though the stations may not yet have quite reached the desired growth. In the case of WKNB-TV we have found excellent agency reaction and almost complete acceptance of the basic sales presentation on the station's value to the advertiser. In this case, the market research analysis shows the station to be well within the cost per thousand limitations. However, the media personnel do need *facts*—not merely guesses and general claims. Uhf stations will rate much higher on the buying schedule when these facts are made available to agencies and the agency can fully justify the purchase of the station to its client.

It seems to me that many of the problems that existed were not basically with uhf, or vhf, or television, or the system, but rather with some of the people concerned. With uhf in its early stages of growth, we must learn to think in terms of



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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