

Raycom adds stations from Malrite

Six TVs, one TBA, one LMA boost group to 8.9% U.S. coverage; price undisclosed

By Sara Brown

Raycom Media Inc. is buying six television stations plus one local marketing agreement and one time brokerage agreement from Malrite Communications Group. The stations will bring the group's total coverage to 8.9% of U.S. TV households.

The buy expands Raycom into two markets larger than any currently in its station group: Cleveland, Nielsen's 13th largest market, and Cincinnati, the nation's 30th market.

In Toledo, Ohio, another Malrite market, Raycom will have a duopoly problem and will to divest either the Malrite station, WNWO-TV, or Raycom's WUPW(TV).

Raycom has found creative ways to

get out of duopoly trouble in the past. Saving its WTOG-TV Savannah, Ga., Raycom swapped WSAV-TV Savannah to Media General for its Richmond station WTVR-TV. As part of the deal, Raycom added to the swap WJTV(TV) Jackson and WHLT(TV) Hattiesburg, both Mississippi, where it now owns WDAM-TV. The swap was valued at \$80 million.

The Malrite deal also marks Raycom's entry into the virtual-duopoly world of LMAs and similar agreements. Sale to an LMA partner may be the answer for Toledo.

Raycom and backer Retirement Systems of Alabama have been looking for a buy since last October when the group reportedly bid \$1.9 billion for LIN Television Corp. which was sold to Hicks-Muses. ■

The Malrite stations

Owned Stations

WOIO(TV) Cleveland
 WXIX-TV Cincinnati
 WFLX(TV) W. Palm Beach, Fla.
 WNWO-TV Toledo, Ohio
 WLII-TV San Juan, P.R.
 WSUR-TV Ponce, P.R.

Local Marketing and Time Brokerage Agreements

WUAB-TV Cleveland, Ohio
 WSTE-TV San Juan, P.R.

Intel gains decoder software rights from Hitachi

Whittier outlines digital TV horizon in multimedia keynote

By Richard Tedesco

Intel Corp. pushed its vision of the digital TV future into a new phase Monday in a deal giving Intel rights to All Format Decoder (AFD) technology from Hitachi America Ltd.

Under terms of the deal, Intel will work Hitachi's AFD technology into software to enable decoding of digital TV signals on PCs. Incorporation of the AFD technology in high-end broadcast-ready PCs means the machines will be able to decode any ATSC formats for high-definition or enhanced-definition formats.

All-format decoding translates to lower digital TV costs, according to Ron Whittier, senior vice president of Intel's content group, by enabling easy up- or down-converting of any digital signal, essentially solving the thorny problem of selecting from the myriad formats for all digital transmissions. "You can do the decoding of the signal in software," Whittier told his NAB audience at the Sands Expo Center.



Intel's Steve Young (l) demonstrates an Intel SmartTV during the keynote delivered by Ron Whittier, Intel senior VP (r).

He reported progress on development of receiver cards costing \$200-\$300 that Intel is planning to begin co-producing with Zenith Electronics by year's end. And he predicted a rapid evolution to digital broadcasts for carriage on a range of platforms. "The basic building blocks are available," Whittier said.

Low-cost PCTV systems are close to reaching the marketplace, according to Whittier, who says Philips and Gateway are producing high-end PCTV units in significant numbers.

On another digital front, Whittier demonstrated a prototype of the content

to be developed for a digital broadcasting service Intel begins testing with PBS later this year (B&C, April 6). Five PBS stations, including WETA-TV Washington, are committed to starting digital transmissions by year's end, according to John Hollar, PBS executive vice president.

Using Intel's Interact Tools 2.0, the companies will co-develop content to be integrated in enhanced digitized broadcasts of PBS history documentaries and children's programming. Hollar joined Whittier to show an interactive version of Ken Burns' "Lewis and Clark" documentary, with a rustic 19th century map of the U.S. framing video of the documentary in a window on screen. Supplementary data selected by the PC user with icons brings text and other material up in the window.

"People who watch PBS inherently want to know more," says Hollar, who sees PBS viewers as likely early adopters of the Pentium-driven technology for the digital Interact. PBS digital transmission formats remain undecided, according to Hollar, who says Intel's AFD software render moot the points of contention between proponents of interlace and progressive scan. ■