

ABC dealing for Allbritton's TVs

Is said to be paying more than \$1 billion for eight stations

By Sara Brown

Allbritton Communications Co.'s eight television stations and two local marketing agreements (LMAs) reportedly are being sold to ABC Inc. for more than \$1 billion, almost 16 times the group's \$62.8 million broadcast cash flow in 1997.

All the stations are ABC affiliates.

Although the deal may still be in the negotiation phase, sources say that Allbritton, which already rejected a smaller offer from ABC, sources say, has informed the stations' management of an impending sale.

The group's WJLA-TV (for Joseph L. Allbritton) Washington is the most attractive station for ABC., sources say.

ABC currently owns 10 television stations, which reach 24.2% of U.S. TV households. The Allbritton stations

would add another 4.8%, boosting ABC's total coverage to 29%.

ABC was number six on BROADCASTING & CABLE's list of top 25 TV groups in April based on its FCC coverage (discounting UHF stations by 50% and not counting LMAs) of 23.9%. With the Allbritton stations, the group would have FCC coverage of 28.1% and would move up the list two places, unseating both NBC Inc. and Tribune Broadcasting.

The Allbritton stations would bring ABC's total to 18 TV stations and two LMAs with no market overlaps.

ABC was the only buyer consulted about the sale, according to sources. The price—if in excess of \$1 billion—would be high, considering the absence of any bidding process.

Officials at Allbritton and ABC have not publicly addressed reports of the sale and did not return phone calls. ■

ABC Inc.		
New York		
Robert Iger, president, ABC		
Subsidiary of The Walt Disney Co.,		
Michael Eisner, chairman		
FCC coverage: 23.9%/10 stations ■ Total coverage: 24.2%		
Station	DMA/Rank	Ch.
WABC-TV	New York/1	7
KABC-TV	Los Angeles/2	7
WLS-TV	Chicago/3	7
WPVI-TV	Philadelphia/4	6
KGO-TV	San Francisco/5	7
KTRK-TV	Houston/11	13
WTVB(TV)	Raleigh/Durham, N.C./29	11
KFSN-TV	Fresno, Calif./55	30
WJRT-TV	Flint, Mich./63	12
WTVG(TV)	Toledo, Ohio/66	13
Allbritton Communications Co.		
Washington		
Joseph L. Allbritton, chairman		
Robert L. Allbritton, president/COO		
FCC coverage: 4.2%/10 stations ■ Total coverage: 4.8%		
Station	DMA/Rank	Ch.
WJLA-TV	Washington/8	7
WHFM-TV	Harrisburg, Pa./45	27
WJXX(TV)	Jacksonville, Fla./54	25
KATV(TV)	Little Rock, Ark./56	7
KTUL(TV)	Tulsa, Okla./58	8
WSET-TV	Lynchburg/Roanoke, Va./68	13
WCIX(TV)	Charleston, S.C./117	4
WDFW-TV	Tuscaloosa, Ala./187	33
LMAs with options		
WISG-TV	Brunswick, Ga./Jacksonville, Fla./54	21
WJSU-TV	Anniston, Ala./201	40

Unity Motion to launch HDTV this week

By Glen Dickson

Start-up HDTV satellite distributor Unity Motion is planning its first national broadcast of HDTV programming Tuesday (June 23). St. Louis-based Unity Motion will uplink a Ku-band signal from Washington International Teleport in Alexandria, Va., and distribute it via the GE Americom Telstar 5 satellite. Downlink sites in Seattle, Los Angeles and St. Louis will demonstrate the programming—which will include both ATSC-standard 1080i and 480P content—to home theater dealers and select customers.

According to Sean Henry, Unity Motion vice president of sales and marketing, programming demonstrated will include a full-length screening of the Sony Pictures movie "Jumanji" and a mix of prerecorded documentary, sports and news footage. Unity Motion



Unity's HDTV satellite demo will include the movie 'Jumanji.'

has secured the rights to 15 other motion pictures from Sony. Henry says; the titles will be disclosed as Unity Motion rolls them out during its promotion this summer. Henry isn't discussing the price Unity Motion paid for "Jumanji," either, citing a nondisclosure agreement between the company and Sony. But he says that Sony charged "half of one percent" of what Unity Motion had budgeted for the Robin Williams flick.

Unity Motion, which has secured private investor funding through Marion Bass Securities, plans its official launch for late September. The company will use transponder space on either the Telstar 7 or 8 satellite, according to Henry. Consumer hardware required for the service includes a DBS-type dish, which will range between 18 inches and

30 inches in its final specification. Signals will be decoded by a Samsung-built IRD and displayed on a multisync monitor made by Princeton Graphics. The monitor shows each ATSC format in its native mode. The Samsung IRD also will have a built-in 8-VSB decoder to handle terrestrial DTV signals from a separate off-air antenna.

The equipment, which will go on sale in late September, will cost \$2,495 for the dish and IRD and \$6,995 for the monitor. Unity Motion won't charge anything for its programming until second quarter 1999, Henry says. It will then charge \$35-\$50 per month for its service, which it views as complementary to a consumer's existing cable or DBS provider.

"We make no pretensions that anybody is going to replace their cable, Primestar or DirecTV for this," Henry says.

Unity Motion will begin shipping demo systems to dealers in mid-July and will run a series of in-store demonstrations throughout the summer. Henry's goal is to run 125 demo sites a night by mid-August. ■