

NBC GOES 'NONSTOP' ON SUBCHANNEL



DOUBLE DUTY WNBC's Chuck Scarborough, left, will anchor a 7 p.m. newscast on "New York Nonstop" for NBC's digital subchannel.



Stations Try Various Genres to Fill Additional Channels on Digital Spectrum

By Daisy Whitney

In the latest digital news programming initiative for local broadcasters, NBC's flagship station WNBC-TV in New York is launching a 24-hour local information and lifestyle subchannel today.

The new subchannel, dubbed "New York Nonstop," has the potential to reach 5.7 million digital homes in the New York area, NBC said.

Programming the digital spectrum has been an ongoing challenge for local stations, which, thanks to the demise of the analog signal, now own more television real estate than they know what to do with.

Several digital subchannels can be created in the bandwidth space previously used by analog channels, enabling stations to carry one or more types of programming or services on the same frequency.

While stations aren't required to program the new subchannels, some are experimenting with niche programming fare, such as sports networks and movie channels, while others are choosing to run additional news on the digital tier since news is a low-cost programming option.

NBC said "New York Nonstop" will debut on subchannel 4.2, with advertisers on board sponsoring local entertainment, lifestyle, event and news coverage.

WNBC marquee talent Chuck Scarborough will anchor a 7 p.m. hourlong newscast on the digital channel that will be an expanded version of the half-hour news he anchors on the main station. The reformatted version for the digital subchannel will afford time for more in-depth interviews with newsmakers, NBC said.

Mr. Scarborough's name recognition and following may help boost viewership in the early days.

"We're branching out to multiple platforms, and we want to continue to evolve and grow our business and ensure we have long-term viability," said Anna Carbonell, spokeswoman for the station. "We're realigning ourselves around content because viewers have changed and they have different habits and we had to change."



CUTTING-EDGE Mekahlo Medina, host of KNBC's "News Raw," uses high-tech tools to produce his show for the Web as well as the station's newscasts.

The launch also dovetails with a bigger push on the part of NBC to remake its stations into hyper-local destinations, whether on-air or on the Web.

In the face of declining viewership and shrinking ad dollars, NBC revamped its local Web sites late

In addition, NBC will run programs from LX.tv, a local lifestyle content producer that NBC purchased a year ago for its New York-centric programs such as "1st Look New York" and "Open House NYC."

Digital news channels are not new to NBC. The media company's Los Angeles station, KNBC-TV, debuted one of the first news efforts for the digital tier three years ago with "News Raw," a weekday pro-

gram that gives KNBC viewers a look into the newsroom, complete with editorial meetings and the process of producing broadcast news.

The news service runs on digital channel 4.2 in Los Angeles and features viewer-submitted photos and videos, in-depth interviews with political figures and local bloggers, and live feeds of major press conferences in the city. "News Raw" is staffed by one reporter, who pulls double duty for the main channel.

Other broadcasters around the country also are firing up extensions of their news franchises to the digital sphere. Chambers Communications-owned ABC affiliate KEZI-TV in Eugene, Ore., launched a 24-hour local news channel on its digital subchannel 9.2 in January. The new service is called "KEZI Nonstop News" and is billed as western Oregon's only 24-hour local news channel.

KEZI launched the news channel as an alternative to the entertainment-centric digital subchannels some of its competitors introduced, the station said. The digital subchannel builds off of an initiative started last fall to offer 10 minutes of nonstop news and weather during evening and late news broadcasts, KEZI said.

News is also a familiar format for advertisers. While stations are getting their feet wet with selling ad space in subchannels, news can be a good fit because it's a natural extension of a station's brand.

director for KNBC.

"News Raw" is a research and development facility for the newsroom, he said. On for five hours each afternoon, "News Raw" yields material for the newscasts and the Web site and also gives KNBC a sandbox in which to try new things.

As an example, the main channel's newscasts are now using "News Raw" host Mekahlo Medina's tech tools, including Skype video and Webcams, for interviews, Mr. Long said.

"News is the only department that produces anything at most TV stations, so anything that gets on TV will probably come out of news," Mr. Long said. "Clearly news departments had to find new distribution systems for their products. It wasn't that people weren't consuming news, but they were bypassing the traditional ways."

It's unclear how many people watch "News Raw" because digital subchannels aren't rated by Nielsen.

Expect more news efforts on digital subchannels, said Tom Petner, editor of broadcast news Web site TVSpy.com. Many stations are aiming to create multimedia staffs who can work across platforms, including on digital channels and the Internet, he explained.

"You're seeing within the larger groups an effort to reshape and reorganize staffs so they can take advantage of these new digital opportunities, including those new channels," he said. "This is obviously not the best time for advertising or ad placement, but then again, you do have a certain economy of scale with your staff and there's a huge opportunity to target your content, much like Cablevision

does with their News12 operations through the metro New York area."

Some local stations are programming their digital subchannels with sports. Most of the stations in the NBC-owned group run Olympic sports-centric channel Universal Sports on one of their subchannels.

In addition, many broadcasters have opted to run AccuWeather's local weather channels on the digital tier. NBC previously offered a digital weather channel in WeatherPlus, but shut down that service late last year. ■

Tom Petner, TVSpy.com

last year into culture, lifestyle and news destinations for their markets. "New York Nonstop" is emblematic of that broader philosophy at the station group.

Producers at WNBC will program specifically for "New York Nonstop," which also will run news and weather every 15 minutes. "New York Nonstop" will lean on Web video creators, independent producers and filmmakers to help fill the space on the channel.



ROBERT LONG
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