

MEDIA '87

The News at 8

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about \$100,000. Those salaries reportedly come with an additional budget for wardrobe. For that income, Barry and Schulberg, in addition to performing their newsroom duties, lend their faces to KGW's advertising campaigns and make personal appearances around the city.

Such public exposure increases the anchors' profiles but may inadvertently encourage viewers to watch the anchors more than listen to the news. Barry says she receives one letter daily about her appearance, and some viewers enclose her picture — clipped from *TV Guide* and retouched with eraser and pencil — to show her how she should wear her hair. Says Barry, "I've learned there's a certain percentage of viewers who don't give you a chance to be less than perfect."

The Business of News

The struggle to get the news right and get it first often runs parallel to another concern: getting more viewers to watch. The watermarks for the popularity of any television show are two ratings services, Arbitron and Nielsen, which "sweep" the Portland market with viewer surveys during the months of February, May, July and November.

In the latest Arbitron "book," for last February, KGW's news at 5 and 11 held the edge both in ratings points (percentage of all possible viewers) and in share (percentage of viewers watching at any given moment) over long-time ratings leader KOIN. But the lead was slim and was tempered by KOIN's lead in

Nielsen's latest book. Just the same, every rating point means KGW will charge an extra \$100 for a minute of advertising — now selling for as much as \$500 for 60 seconds. The local television business remains lucrative, with the stations carving up an estimated \$90 million to \$100 million in ad revenues. KGW, which will not release specific numbers, takes in an estimated \$18 million to \$25 million for the Seattle-based King Broadcasting. In fact, all of the stations are owned by out-of-town companies: KATU by Fisher Broadcasting in Seattle, KOIN by Lee Enterprises in Davenport, Iowa, and KPTV by Chris-Craft Industries in New York. And while it's unclear how much money news departments earn for the stations, the revenue easily justifies the estimated \$3 million KGW spends annually on news.

These stations, and their parent companies, don't simply want a lot of viewers; they want the right kind of viewers — namely, women ages 24 to 49, who make the household buying decisions. In this area, KGW holds a comfortable (and in turn lucrative) lead over both its competitors. "Our newscast has generally slanted to the right audience demographics," says Irwin Starr, KGW's station manager.

Starr says most TV viewers, and especially those in Portland, tend to be faithful to a particular news program: "You don't [attract viewers] simply by saying, 'Hey, we've got Pete and Tracy here.' You do it by offering something different that other stations don't offer." In May during sweeps, all three stations will be offering something different. At

KGW, for example, the news will air a 14-part series on China in hopes viewers who wouldn't otherwise be watching will tune in night after night.

Probably KGW's most naked effort to attract viewers during a sweeps period was in May 1986, when the station took its newscast on the road to such spots as Bonneville Dam, Bend and Newport. But the extravaganza (nicknamed "truck week" after the much-heralded satellite truck used for the shows) was, staffers say privately, a major disappointment that — due to the pre-production work involved — hurt KGW's regular coverage in the weeks before the broadcasts.

More important, the "themecasts" failed to "spike" in that month's ratings sweeps as KGW had hoped. Says one reporter, "It was like viewers felt, 'They had the technology and could do it. So what?'"

Perhaps more than anything else, TV news as we know it today is the product of media consultants, who study newscasts nationwide and do private research to tell, for example, what viewers like and dislike about the news. For this work, KGW reportedly pays its consultant, Frank Magid Inc., between \$50,000 and \$100,000 annually. Says one KGW staffer, "You can always tell when the consultant's been here because you get requests to do more things out of the ordinary, like more live shots and walking stand-ups [reporters on camera]."

But KGW staff members say that, unlike other stations they have worked for, the consultants play much less of a role at Channel 8.

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