

INTRODUCING THE 20TH CENTURY COMMUNITY CENTRE.

Your community.

What do you know about it?

That is, how can you really find out about what's going on in the community you live in. Well, if you're fortunate you may have a local newspaper but unfortunately many people don't. And those that do only get it every so often. You see, up until now nobody's really paid much attention to communications within the community. In fact, it's been sadly neglected.

But now your community has an exciting and dynamic new voice. A voice that will create far greater awareness of everything that's happening in your community. Anything from a town council meeting to a little league baseball tournament. It's called cable television.

And that's the purpose of this little booklet. To explain to you how very simple and essential it is for you and your community to participate in community programming on cable television, the Twentieth Century Community Centre.

How to start

Let's start by assuming that your group has something to say to the community. In fact, you may have already tried some of the conventional means — press releases, letters to the editor, perhaps even meetings or demonstrations. If you

have then you realize how very difficult it is to get enough coverage. Because unfortunately the amount you get always seems to depend upon how dramatically or sensationally you can express yourself. And when finally your message does get through, it's usually been filtered or modified by sources that you have no control over.

But not with cable. You see, cable offers the possibility of a regular ongoing programme. Already groups similar to yours are taking advantage of the many benefits that cable can offer. And in order for your group to get involved all you have to do is indicate your interest. Just contact the programmer for the cable company in your area and tell him about your group and what you have in mind. And in a very short time, you'll be on the cable.

It's that simple.

Of course, there are a few things you must realize first. One is that you can't go on the air whenever you like. Your program has to be worked in to the existing timetable that the cable company already has. In fact, you'll find that the cable company would prefer you to set up a series of shows rather than just a "one-shot" effort. Then too, you and your group should have a fairly well-established plan for how you'd like to approach your programme. You'll find that it helps if your group is formally structured when it comes to assigning responsibilities. Also, you should realize that, although you will be instructed in how to use the equipment, you can't expect to operate it without professional supervision. And so, the cable company staff, will be glad to help you in any way they can.

Finally, regarding the content of your program. The cable company will naturally want to ensure that it doesn't in any way violate the slander and libel regulations established by the Broadcast Act.

The technical aspects

Now you're ready to come into the studio. It's quite different from a standard broadcast studio. There will likely be curtains at one end, lights at the side, two cameras that are about half the size of broadcast television cameras at the other end, a switcher console that allows the director to see both camera shots and pick one and some video tape machines (VTR's).

Now because most cable companies are always understaffed your group should realize that they may be expected to operate some of the equipment themselves.

But that really isn't a problem. In fact, it only takes about an hour to learn how to operate a camera. And with experience your shots will get better and better. The microphones are even easier to operate. You'll be using either stand-up mikes or boom mikes. Lighting gets a bit complicated, but usually it's just a matter of aiming properly. The switcher-console is a very complicated piece of equipment and it's here that the cable company can help you by giving you a professional operator. Yet usually you're more than welcome to have one of



your group working with the director so that you'll have a full participation in your programme. If your programme is going to be edited then two VTR's are required. One feeds the other, but only on signal from the editor. As you can imagine, it's a very time-consuming operation, but again, a member of your group can often sit in on the editing to see that your show comes out the way you want it to. However, many cable companies prefer to do most of their work in the studio in order to avoid spending too much time editing.

As far as mobile coverage goes, you'll probably find that most cables companies are, at this stage anyway, mostly studio oriented. However this will change as equipment gets better and the programming departments get more manpower.

The Hardware

As far as your cameras go, there's no problem about what kind you use. They're all compatible. But unfortunately, that's not the case with VTR's. In general, you'll find that most cable operators use one of three brands: IVC, Sony or Ampex. Now the problem arises when you want to playback from one system to another. It simply can't be done.

However, you can "dub" from one type of VTR to another but there will be a loss of quality. So whenever possible you should use the master (first copy) for playback in order to get the best results. But up until now we've discussed only 1" machines where the video tape is one inch in width. The most exciting recent development, however, has been the ½" machine and in time it's going to revolutionize cable programming. You see, the ½" machine is portable enough that it will allow programme producers to get out of the studios and into the community. The only real drawback is that the picture quality is not as good as it would be on a 1" machine although it is expected that this will change shortly. And once again you have the same problem that you have on the 1" machine — no two brands are compatible.

In fact, even old ½" machines are not compatible to newer ones made by the same manufacturer. Yet when you consider the great mobility and increased effectiveness that the ½" machine can give you, its limitations are really not serious.

But where do you get the programming equipment for mobile purposes? Well, certainly there's always the cable company. However, a great deal of their equipment will either be in use making studio productions with groups such as yours or being serviced. So, you may have to find other ways of locating equipment. The first place to look is the educational institutions. In fact, you'll find that most Community Colleges have very elaborate audio visual departments, and after all, you're paying for it. You might try local high schools. If they do have equipment, it's only being used between 9 and 4. Usually though, Boards of Education are reluctant to let "outsiders" use their equipment, but a persuasive group can usually get results working through a trustee. Libraries and private companies are other areas you might also try.

Putting it all together

It's true you don't need a script, but you do need a plan. A plan that will make your show easy to shoot and easy to watch. Many cable programmes are of the "talk show" variety. It's probably not the most stimulating format in the world, but it certainly is the simplest, so that might be one consideration. You can use your imagination to come up with a more provocative format. You might try using more people and having them well prepared to say something. Or perhaps you might try using two or even three sets (locations within the studio). And whether you shoot your programme "live" or tape it, shoot to your plan. There's nothing wrong with spontaneous television, in fact, it's to be encouraged. But even the most spontaneous programmes have evolved from a well-thought out plan.

There are aids that you can use too. Like graphics. They're drawings or still photos or words or sentences that you can use to stress what you're trying to say. Or you might try using a Telecine unit if your cable company has one. It converts motion pictures or slides to television. In fact, many good programmes are built around 35mm slides or 16mm movies. And you should always try to think of a stimulating introduction and a strong ending. Throughout the show it's always a good idea to explain who you are, what you are doing and how viewers can contact you. It's people like yourself who can help make community programming the Twentieth Century Community Centre.

ROGERS CABLE