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STRICTLY BUSINESS

TV One targets black viewers

By Krissah Williams
WASHINGTON POST

It is eight days to airtime for TV One, a new cable channel aimed at African Americans. The editor sitting in a darkened room full of television monitors has raced all day assembling a seven-minute promotional video TV One LLC will use to try to persuade the cable company in Chicago and New York to carry the channel. The editor hits play.

The screen in this Washington production house flickers, lighting up the editor's face, as soul music crooner Al Green starts to sweat and moan the words to "Love and Happiness." The screen fades to rhythm-and-blues queen Patti LaBelle winking at the camera, while the title of her new show, "Living it Up With Patti LaBelle," floats beside her. It ends with a black-and-white scene: An actor playing civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. stands behind a podium preaching passionately.

TV One President Johnathan Rodgers nods. "I'm impressed," he says, before ripping the promotional video apart. Green's segment is too long; move the King piece; end with the network's upbeat jingle, he tells the editor.

Then it is on to the next thing. It has been like this for the entire frenetic year leading up to the channel's launch today in the homes of 2.2 million cable customers in Washington and six other cities.

TV One is a direct competitor to Black Entertainment Television, the first big cable television channel aimed at black viewers. It aims, though, to be different — to eschew sexy hip-hop videos for more traditional TV fare such as sitcoms and talk shows. There is a lot riding on the channel, and not just culturally — Radio One Inc., the nation's largest black-owned radio company, which is based in Prince George's County, has staked a lot of its cash and its reputation on this new channel being a winner.

Chapter One for TV One

TV One's story began two winters ago, when Radio One Chairman Alfred C. Liggins III phoned Rodgers at Silver Spring's Discovery Communications Inc., where he was president of its U.S. networks, including the Discovery Channel, TLC (formerly The Learning Channel) and Animal Planet. The brash Liggins, then 38, introduced himself to Rodgers, 58. "I want to start this [black] cable network," Rodgers recalls him saying, "and I was talking to [Grammy-award-winning musician] Quincy Jones. He says there's only one brother who can do it: Johnathan Rodgers."

The two men met at Rodgers's Cleveland Park home and found they had a lot in common, including the area. Liggins was having a home built in the Northwest Washington neighborhood. Rodgers is a man whose serious demeanor camouflages a dry wit. He is a broadcast industry veteran who worked for 20 years at CBS as a reporter and producer before going over to Discovery.

Rodgers told Liggins that the idea of an African American cable channel had been nagging at him for years. He had worked in television for three decades, but no channel reflected his tastes. Liggins, on the other hand, is a numbers guy who led Radio One's public offering in 1999; he saw a lucrative business in what seemed a relatively uncrowded market.

Soon after that first meeting, Rodgers quit Discovery and began working as an unpaid consultant to Liggins. Later Liggins flew to Philadelphia for a meeting with Amy Banse, executive vice president of programming investments for Comcast Corp., the nation's largest cable company. Banse, who is trying to increase Comcast's pro-

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American Online is negotiating to buy BlackVoices.com from Tribune Corp. AOL is eyeing more than 800,000 BVQ members, but BVQ magazine (above) is not in negotiations.

America Online, Tribune Corp. in negotiations for BlackVoices website

Purchase could boost strategy for Africana.com

By Ken Smikle
TARGET MARKET NEWS

The nation's leading Internet service provider, America Online, is in negotiations to purchase BlackVoices.com from the Web site's owner, Tribune Co. A deal could be announced before the end of January.

BlackVoices, one of the nation's most visited black Web sites, has been seeking an investor to prevent the shutting down of operations of the 8-year-old company. Earlier efforts to form a merger with Vanguard Media ended when the magazine publisher abruptly filed for bankruptcy.

The Tribune Co. had planned to simply shut down the wholly-owned division at the end of last year but delayed action when AOL, a division of TimeWarner, expressed interest.

Though BlackVoices.com remains an active Web site, most of the employees have already been laid off or have taken a hiatus until the company's future is decided. The Tribune is attempting to find positions for some staffers within its newspaper business.

According to industry sources familiar with the discussions, America Online is interested in acquiring BlackVoices' assets, which include its membership list of 830,000 names and advertising contracts. It is not known if the company's magazine, the quarterly BVQ, will be part of the purchase, or what its future will be if it's not.

Presumably, BlackVoices' assets could be used to boost AOL's Black Focus service, which was launched in May of last year, or be combined with Africana.com, another

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Backlash brews as white-collar jobs move

By Rachel Konrad
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Executives from Silicon Valley to Wall Street are adamant that shifting white-collar jobs from the United States to developing countries is good business, but a backlash is brewing.

Indiana's state government canceled a \$15 million contract with an Indian consulting firm in November. And eight states voted on bills last year that would ban the use of taxpayer money on contracts with foreign workers. Though none of those measures passed, the states and several others are expected to consider similar bills this year.

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry says he would require overseas call centers to disclose their location — the New Economy version of the "made in America" label.

The Massachusetts senator said he wouldn't ban outsourcing, but would provide tax credits to companies that maintain U.S. factories and "close every single loophole that gives companies incentives to move jobs abroad."

Outsourcing critics say Americans have been complacent about the loss of technology jobs to overseas workers since the trend began in the late 1990s. But with elections in both the United States and India, they believe 2004 could be a turning point.

"Politicians can't outsource the vote," said Scott Kirwin, founder of the Wilmington, Del.-based lobbying group Information Technology Professionals Association of America, which compiles data from nearly 100 anti-outsourcing Web sites. Kirwin, who launched ITPAA after a large investment bank asked him to train the Indian worker who then replaced him, says said only broad consumer revolt will reverse the trend.

"In the 1980s, many people boycotted companies that did business with the apartheid regime in South Africa," Kirwin said. "Many of those same people have more money today and don't like doing business with companies from countries that work against us politically, like France, or economically, like India and China. Consumer activism is an important part of putting the brakes on the outsourcing movement."

After his software development job was terminated in 2002, Florida's Mike Emmons decided to run for Congress on an anti-outsourcing agenda. His meager campaign funds come mostly from unemployed programmers who visit his Web site, OutsourceCongress.org. He is trying to get on the ballot for the Democratic primary this summer.

"This is hitting medical transcribers, financial analysts, radiologists, everyone," said Emmons, 41. "If you work at a desk, beware —"

See BACKLASH/7C

It's Hummer vs. Jeep in SUV sweepstakes



Hummer H2



Jeep

By Michael Ellis
REUTERS

DETROIT — A long-simmering dispute between the beefy sport utility brands Hummer and Jeep has heated up with one-upmanship claims and accusations of copied designs.

The mud-slinging between the off-road SUV brands began nearly three years ago when DaimlerChrysler AG's Jeep claimed the about-to-be launched Hummer H2 from General Motors Corp. copied its grille.

That battle ended when a judge allowed the H2 to go into production, but now the war has moved from the courtroom to television commercials, the printed page and the auto show floor.

At stake is one of the fastest-

growing and most profitable segments of the market. With sales of the Hummer H2 far above forecasts since it was launched 19 months ago, and GM making plans to expand the brand, Hummer is making a serious run at Jeep's claim to be the premier American off-road SUV.

The latest spat began when Jeep took a shot at Hummer with a recent TV ad that claims Jeeps are better in the mud.

The commercial shows several kids in Jeep pedal cars slogging through an obstacle course, while a yellow Hummer-like SUV, labeled "Imitator," gets stuck in the muck. A boy in the Hummer look-a-like can only shake his head when a girl says, "If it's not Trail-Rated, it's not a Jeep 4x4."

The ad recalls a Hummer spot,

set to the song "Happy Jack" by rock group The Who, in which a boy wins a soapbox derby with a Hummer-like car by outsmarting his opponents and driving off-road.

Chrysler spokesman Jason Vines said the Jeep ad is "good-natured fun," and it's common for competitors to knock other products in commercials.

He was more irritated with suggestions that Jeep has copied Hummer.

Earlier this month, Jeep took the wraps off a concept SUV, the large and boxy Jeep Rescue, that bears a strong resemblance to the Hummer H2. Like the H2, the Rescue has round headlights, a slotted grille and exposed hinges around its four doors. Both vehicles also sit high for easy ground clearance in rocky terrain.

"Who's zooming who?"

"You know how this business is, you show something and it's copied," Hummer General Manager Mike DiGiovanni, standing amid the Hummer exhibit at the Detroit auto show, told Reuters. "My reference point is this auto show with all the, as the media calls it, the Hummer wannabes."

"Who's zooming who here? Who's copying who?" Chrysler's Vines said, noting that Jeep has been around for 60 years. "I personally don't think it's a copy."

Indeed, the Rescue also shares similarities with its smaller cousin, the Jeep Wrangler. Both the Jeep and the Hummer trace their roots to military vehicles, where function dictates form, and to the same company. Jeep's former owner American Motors created AM General in 1971 to build military vehicles, and eventually the Humvee truck.

Looks aside, Chrysler group marketing chief Joe Eberhardt questioned the ruggedness of the Hummer H2 in January when he said in an interview with Automotive News that the SUV wouldn't be able to negotiate the Rubicon Trail, an off-road route in California that is the traditional test of every Jeep.

Hummer's DiGiovanni said he would send a letter and documentation to Automotive News challenging Eberhardt's assertion.

This is quite a bit of bluster for two brands that don't directly compete against each other yet. Prices for the Hummer H2 start at about \$50,000, far above any Jeep.

But that will change next year when Hummer launches the smaller H3, which will be priced starting in the \$30,000 range, competing directly with the new Jeep Grand Cherokee, which will debut at the New York Auto Show in April.