

## NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Yvonne Maddox  
800-616-8081  
[ymaddox@probitaspress.com](mailto:ymaddox@probitaspress.com)

### HOW CABLE TV OVERTOOK THE NETWORKS

Cell phones, the Internet, and other modern communication devices today get the lion's share of public attention. But consumers' love affair with traditional television is stronger than ever: The average American home has more TV sets than people [2.73 vs. 2.55], and at least one is on eight hours a day—the most ever. [source: Nielsen Media Research]

A coming book shows how the sharp decline of the original big three networks, ABC, CBS and NBC, and the corresponding rise of cable, starting three decades ago, led to today's pervasive television environment. The book is "Television Tightrope: How I Escaped Hitler, Survived CBS, and Fathered Viacom," by Ralph Baruch with Lee Roderick.

"Tightrope" is due out in April 2007, published by Probitas Press and distributed by Independent Publishers Group.

Baruch was a group president at CBS in New York when the FCC in 1970 forced the networks to shed several operations, including cable and syndication. CBS spun off a new company, Viacom, with Baruch as CEO. Baruch spearheaded cable's David vs. Goliath struggle against the powerful networks, rallying other cable companies and testifying often in Washington.

(more)

The result: In 1977 American viewers got seven channels at most, all from broadcasting.

Today they can get 500—all but a handful from cable.

“If ABC, CBS and NBC had perceived early on that one day cable would create its own programs and much more, in direct competition,” writes Baruch, “they likely would have reacted sooner than they did. But they were asleep at the wheel. They dismissed cable as a crass pretender, a parasite that would be crushed in due time by friends in Congress and at the FCC.” [see p. 210]

Baruch explains that “The FCC threw a security blanket over broadcast television” that included severe content restrictions for cable. “The agency inscrutably ruled that pay cable could not show films that were between two and ten years old. Successful films remained in theatrical distribution for two to three years, then went directly to the networks. This essentially made it impossible for pay cable to present recent movies.” [see p. 217]

Such content restrictions were overturned by the courts in 1977 [HBO vs. FCC]. Pay cable finally had a mandate to fly. That same year, Baruch organized and led the National Cable Television Association’s lobbying effort to secure basic cable’s rights in U.S. law. He succeeded seven years later when Congress passed the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984—the first major revision of the U.S. Communications Act in 50 years. [see p. 286-88]

Cable’s long climb reached a major milestone in the 2003-2004 viewing season. For the first time, the combined household share [percentage of televisions turned on at the time] of the top 60-plus basic cable outlets beat that of the seven broadcast networks. And in 2006, for the fifth consecutive year, shares of ad-supported cable networks in prime time easily defeated the broadcast networks.

###