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## Syndication on a roll in Vegas *Dealmaking at annual confab more like 'days of old'*

By Steve Brennan  
and Andrew Wallenstein

LAS VEGAS — For a conference that had been written off by many as an effective arena to make deals, NATPE 2004 turned out to be quite busy on the dealmaking front.

The annual NATPE program conference, which ended Tuesday, was hardly the pivotal mar-

ket that it was in bygone years when new syndicated shows could be launched and cleared in a couple of days. But TV sales executives from the major studios were busy Tuesday tallying up program clearances inked at the market.

NBC Enterprises executive vp Barry Wallach was at NATPE clearing, among other shows, the new syndicated strip hosted by

Jane Pauley. He reported very brisk business throughout the market, noting that "The Jane Pauley Show" is now cleared in 95% of the country. NBCE's "Starting Over" is renewed in 55% of the country for a second season. "We had wall-to-wall meetings," said Wallach, whose company was one of numerous syndicators that opted to take booths on the convention floor at the Sands Expo Center. "We signed a lot of business at this market."

The market was split between syndicators who took hospitality suites at the Venetian hotel and those who took booths in the attached Sands Expo Center.

The great divide forced many TV buyers to dash back and forth from the exhibition floor to the hotel suites — a 10-minute walk. Some buyers scheduled all their hotel meetings on Day 1 of the conference and then dedicated the

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next day to meetings on the exhibition floor.

This arrangement did not sit well with some attendees. Bhuvan Lall, head of New Delhi, India-based Lall Entertainment, strongly urged program sellers to try to gather in a single center next year. "I'm exhausted running back and forth through the casino from the floor to the hotel; I think it's ridiculous, really," Lall said.

John Weiser, NATPE co-chair and executive vp sales at Sony Pictures Television, was set up on the convention floor and was ecstatic at the amount of business he achieved. "We have to get the sales team together to tally up clearances, but I can report that we were definitely signing program clearance deals," he said.

On the question of the conference division, Weiser said: "We are talking to the syndicators who took booths and think we can con-

vince some of them to return to the floor next year in light of the success of this year's conference. There will be some who will want to remain with the hotel-suite arrangement, but it could turn out that they will be in the minority."

One of the companies expressing enthusiasm for the suite arrangement was Paramount Domestic Television, which reported brisk business, especially for renewals and new clearances for its movie review weekly "Hot Ticket." "It was a very good and lively conference for us," said Mark Dvornik, executive vp and general sales manager. "We knew coming in that we would be heavily scheduled, but we also had extra traffic coming through the suite, and we are very excited about how the suite worked out."

Paul Franklin, executive vp/general manager of sales at Twentieth Television, also remained enthusiastic about the

hotel hospitality suite arrangement. "We did a lot of business, and we really liked the suite arrangement," he said. "It works very well for us, though we realize there is a desire for everybody to be on one floor."

In the past, the entire confab was housed at a single center where syndicators set up massive booths and hospitality suites. But many felt that more cost-effective hotel suites would be a better way to go. The past two NATPEs saw the major U.S. TV distributors abandon the exhibition floor entirely. This year saw the return of many to the floor — albeit with much more modest booths.

Bob Cook, president and chief operating officer at Twentieth, said at NATPE that the new makeover strip "Ambush Makeover" is cleared in 70% of the country for a national launch in the fall.

Said Cook: "We're extremely pleased with the success of our shows at this year's convention.

Whether in suites or on the convention floor, it seemed that everyone had a good experience and that NATPE is beginning to look more like the days of old."

Tony Vinciguerra, president and CEO of Fox Cable Networks Group, was pleased to see the fruits of his labor on the NATPE board of directors ripening because of the instrumental role he played in reconfiguring the convention. "This is the result of a plan we set in motion three years ago, and I think it's working," he said. "It's good to see the majors on the floor again."

In her first NATPE as senior vp planning, scheduling and acquisitions at Lifetime, Leslie Glenn-Chesloff was able to get significant business done. "We've really been exploring areas like getting more theatrical packages," she said. "This was a good show for meeting the people we want to be in business with." ■