

power they want," said Art Rockwell, media analyst with Yaeger Capital Markets. "They know they need a high-powered TV executive in there to consolidate that end of their business into workable groups."

But some insiders questioned whether Iger will be overextended. Sources say Reiss's duties eventually will be expanded to involve the Capital Cities/ABC Broadcast Group now that Michael Mallardi, a 30-year ABC veteran and senior vice president of the broadcast group, has confirmed plans to retire in June.

Although most believe there are

more changes on the horizon, last week's restructuring announcement came as a relief to many who had been braced for a major shake-up of Disney's executive TV ranks. Details of the plan, in the works for months, were said to have been closely guarded by Eisner and Ovitz, fueling internal rumors and speculation about the fate of high-profile staffers at Disney and ABC.

The announcement did not quiet persistent rumors that Howard Stringer, former president of the CBS/Broadcast Group, is preparing to join Disney as a top executive.

Talk of a possible merger of Disney's Americast and rival telco start-up Tele-TV, which Stringer now heads, has heated up in the wake of the planned merger between Baby Bells SBC Communications and Pacific Telesis. SBC is a partner in Americast, while Pacific Telesis is aligned with Tele-TV.

If the two sides join forces, sources say Disney may try to bring Stringer on board to manage its end of the combined venture. Ovitz, who was an adviser to Tele-TV before he joined Disney last year, is said to have high regard for Stringer. ■

Spelling, New World courtships continue

Price said to be principal issue in pursuit of both companies

By Cynthia Littleton

One has been up for sale for months; the other has been courted by a patient suitor. But analysts say Spelling Entertainment and New World Communications Group have one thing in common: an asking price deemed too high by prospective buyers.

Rupert Murdoch, News Corp. chairman, last week threw cold water on rampant rumors that Fox was close to

acquiring all or part of New World, telling reporters at the NAB convention that no talks were taking place. Sources close to New World, however, said the on-again, off-again negotiations between the two sides were on again in Los Angeles last week.

Murdoch's intentions toward New World have been the subject of much speculation since Fox bought a 20% stake in the company as part of its landmark 1994 affiliation agreement with 10 of the 12 New World stations.

New World's other assets include a TV production division headed by Brandon Tartikoff and an international distribution arm.

New World "looks very expensive to me at the moment," Murdoch said in an interview with Bloomberg Business News earlier this month. "We are always looking for new stations, but we try to buy them at a reasonable multiple."

Representatives for Murdoch and New World declined comment, but

Fisher gets expanded role at MCA

In the latest move at MCA, the Universal Family Entertainment (UFE) and Universal Cartoon Studios (UCS) divisions have been folded into MCA Television Entertainment (MTE) to streamline the studio's television activities.

The move, the most recent in MCA Television Group Chairman Greg Meidel's restructuring of the studio's television arm, indicates a greater role for MTE President Barbara Fisher, who now will oversee the two divisions in addition to her existing duties.

"Barbara's proven leadership abilities, combined with her business acumen and keen creative instincts, make her uniquely suited to take the helm of this newly restructured division," said Meidel.

Jeff Segal, who had been overseeing UFE as president, is leaving his position to enter into a production deal with the MCA Television Group. He will develop and produce programming for the division.

UCS is the production entity of UFE that produces animation for the networks and cable. UCS series now



Barbara Fisher gets expanded responsibilities.

on the air include *Casper* for the Fox Children's Network; *Earthworm Jim* for Kids' WB, and *Savage Dragon* for the USA Network. MTE primarily supplies long-form programming to the networks and cable. The latest MTE project is *Peter Benchley's The Beast*, a miniseries for NBC that will air during the May sweeps.

The restructuring will not affect Universal Television, which supplies series to the networks. The division will continue to operate separately from MTE, with Tom Thayer overseeing that area as president.

In other MCA Television Group news, the studio has signed writer/producers

Rick Copp and David Goodman to an exclusive multi-year production deal. The pair most recently wrote and served as supervising producers on *The Adventures of Captain Zoom in Outer Space*, which aired in syndication as part of MCA TV's Action Pack Feature. Under the new deal, Copp and Goodman will create, develop and produce programming for network and syndication distribution.

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