

MarketEye: Honolulu

By Michael Malone

Battling the New Hawaiian King

Honolulu stations scramble to tackle three-headed newsgathering behemoth

The three-station “Hawaii News Now” conglomerate was envisioned as a news power in Honolulu when it launched in 2009, and it’s starting to act like one. KHON was news leader in DMA No. 71 for years, but up against

the virtual triopoly, it is losing ground. Boasting a massive newsroom that cranks out 40½ hours of news per week, Hawaii News Now (HNN) is flexing its muscle.

HNN is the joint news operation for Raycom-owned CBS affiliate KGMB and NBC affiliate KHNL, along with MCG Capital’s KFVE, serving up newscasts for all three stations, with the trio promoting the product. The combined resources are formidable. “It’s the largest newsgathering staff in the market for sure,” says Mark Platte, HNN news director. “That’s what I see on the air every night—more reporters and more photographers.”

The strain on KHON is showing. Joe McNamara, president and GM since 2006, resigned on Feb. 25. On March 5, KHON tapped Kristina Lockwood, sales director for Cox Media’s California division, to succeed McNamara. LIN Media acquired Fox affiliate KHON last year in its \$330 million pickup of New Vision Television.

Living on a remote island, residents have a unique connection to Hawaiian media, and locally reared anchors and managers are well received. The Honolulu stations had a massive story to cover in December with the death of Daniel Inouye, a U.S. senator for almost 50 years. Rick Blangiardi, Hawaii News Now VP and general manager, says he was proud of the wall-to-wall coverage of the milestone by HNN on-air and online. “We continue to look for every opportunity to be that voice for Hawaii,” Blangiardi says.

Honolulu is a Nielsen diary market; stations were awaiting February sweeps ratings at presstime. KGMB won the early morning and 5 p.m. news races in the November sweeps, along with prime-time and total-day household ratings. Late news has been close for years, but November showed more distance; KGMB’s 9.5 HH rating/24.8 share bested



Keahi Tucker and Stephanie Lum deliver the late news for Hawaii News Now, the joint brand that represents the CBS, NBC and MyNetworkTV affiliates in Honolulu.

KHON’s 7.2/18.7. KHON took 6 p.m. news honors.

Besides personnel, Hawaii News Now’s advantages include local HD and frequent use of a leased helicopter, which Platte says it deploys about once a week. HNN also has a full-blown digital strategy, including nearly 97,000 Facebook fans (KHON2 News has almost 28,000). “We’re out there pushing through meaningful updates,” says Blangiardi, who presents two on-air editorials weekly. “I think it affects the quality of life here.”

Hearst Television owns ABC affiliate KITV; anchor Paula Akana got a sit-down with President Obama on Feb. 19. Andrew Jackson took over managing the station in 2011 and brought a varied resume back to Honolulu, which includes a senior VP role at BBC Worldwide and posts at FX and the WB—as well as at KGMB and KITV, overseeing marketing and promotion. Jackson is boosting KITV’s presence by strengthening daytime (where *Dr. Oz* and *Ellen* thrive) and growing its news output.

KITV runs an hour of late news. Jackson is also eyeing an early evening news expansion. “We are getting traction here,” he says. “We’re another voice in the market, and I think we’re a unique one.”

KFVE is the MyNetworkTV affiliate. The station has a shared services agreement with KGMB and KHNL, but has its own management and programs 22 hours a day. In addition to running Hawaii News Now in newscasts at 8 a.m., 6:30 p.m. and 9 p.m., “K5” features a cooking show, quiz program and a range of music shows, including a summer performance program called *Hot Hawaii Nights*.

“Since we became part of the news arrangement, our focus has been on more local programming,” says John Fink, KFVE VP and general manager.

That includes televising the Merrie Monarch Festival in April, which Fink likens to the Super Bowl of hula. This year is the 50th anniversary, which makes a giant annual celebration even larger. Fink says the televised event will win the time period across its three days. “It’s costumes, tradition, culture, beauty, music,” he says. “It’s unbelievable.”

Oceanic is the market’s major subscription TV player. KHON airs The CW on its dot-two. The Raycom stations have Antenna TV and This TV as subchannels, while KITV’s multicast tier has a mix of Me-TV programming and an innovative local play (see sidebar). Independent KIKU programs primarily for the Japanese population and Kbfd for the Korean one.

The high cost of living in Hawaii has made the recession hangover hard to shake. Tourism and the military are the principal economic engines. The former is thriving, but with so much local employment tied to the federal government, considerable anxiety exists regarding the sequestration battle in the Beltway. “The two biggies are tourism and government, and half of that equation is doing extremely well,” says Jackson.

The competition is curious how LIN’s arrival will affect the local TV business landscape. “We can make the assumption that they’ll raise the bar,” says Blangiardi, “but we welcome more competition.”

Hawaii News Now continues to hire staff to extend its lead in Honolulu. “We’ve come a long way in a relatively short time,” says Blangiardi. “There’s a dependency on what we do as a news organization; I think we’ve made a huge impact.”

H A W A I I

NEWS NOW
