



## TELEVISION

### **Liberman's Estrella TV Signs Up Texas Affiliates**

By Mary Sutter

Hispanic Market Weekly

Published: February 09, 2009

Liberman Broadcasting has signed up the first affiliates for its fledgling Estrella TV network, in four markets in Texas.

The affiliate agreement with Communications Corporation of America is a multicasting deal with four stations, expected to launch at the end of the second quarter or early in the third.

Estrella TV will air on a digital channel tied to the following stations:

- KVEO-Channel 23 in Brownsville-McAllen; an NBC affiliate
- KTSM-Channel 9 in El Paso; an NBC affiliate
- KETK-Channel 56 in Tyler-Longview; an NBC affiliate
- KWKT-Channel 44 in Waco; a Fox/My Network Television affiliate

Collectively, the four Texas stations cover five percent of the U.S. Hispanic market in the U.S. However, border areas in Texas have been among the slowest to prepare for the transition to digital transmission, a switch now postponed from February 17 to June 12.

Under the terms of the deal, Spanish Media Rep Team, a subsidiary of LBI Media, will handle sales for the affiliates.

Estrella TV is currently carried on six Liberman owned-and-operated stations, including two in Texas - KZJL-Channel 61 in Houston and KMPX-Channel 29 in Dallas.

The flagship station for Estrella TV is KRCA-Channel 62 in Los Angeles. Headquartered in Burbank, Liberman owns a production facility there from which it produces 56 hours of original programming a week, ranging from newscasts to comedy shows. Game shows are in the works.

The other Estrella TV outlets are KSDX-Channel 29 in San Diego, KPNZ-Channel 24 in Salt Lake City and KVPA-Channel 42, a low-power station in Phoenix.

"Our programming is very successful" Lenard Liberman, executive vice president of LBI Media says. "We're number two in Los Angeles, beating TeleFutura and Telemundo in prime-time and early fringe."

Liberman stations had been operating as Spanish-language independents until recently. In December, the company unveiled the plan to market and brand its outlets as a network - Estrella TV (HMW Archives, 12/29/08. Liberman Prepares To Create A Star).

The company aims to extend its reach to 70 percent of the national Hispanic population by the end of 2009 – with an ultimate goal of competing head on with Univision. With the CCA stations

and another station in escrow, Estrella TV will reach 47 percent of the U.S. Hispanic market, a LBI spokesperson says.

CCA owns or operates other stations in Texas and in Louisiana. The privately-held company did not return calls seeking additional information.

Among the executives behind Estrella TV is the former president of Telemundo Stations Group, Ibra Morales. Morales, who left the network in May when his contract was not renewed, is now vice president of network operations at Liberman.

While seeking more affiliates, the company has not ruled out ownership expansion. "In certain markets, we'll probably just buy a station," Liberman says.

Other station-based groups pursuing national audiences have faced hurdles in realizing their ambitions.

Spanish Broadcasting System's Mega TV in Miami announced its first digital deal last month and launched at the end of January on digital channel KMCC-Channel 32, serving the Las Vegas DMA. While Mega has national coverage via satellite provider DirecTV, it is otherwise only available on stations in South Florida - in Miami-Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach - and in Puerto Rico.

Between cable carriage deals and stations in Puerto Rico, New York and Miami, CaribeVisión Broadcasting Network says it reaches seven million homes – but not all are Hispanic.

Bilingual-bicultural channel LATV began to move beyond its Los Angeles broadcast base in 2007, pursuing a digital multicasting strategy. As of December, it had 35 such agreements in place in 20 of the top 25 Hispanic markets and through those affiliates, it has carriage on basic cable.

Azteca América, which launched in 2001 with just one station in Los Angeles, faced competition from Univision-owned TeleFutura as both networks sought to sign up affiliates. Two years later, Azteca América covered 60 percent of the Hispanic market but many of its affiliates were low-power stations, limiting its reach. Today it operates in 66 markets but Azteca América's exact reach is unclear.

Univision reaches nearly all Hispanic television households, with 97 percent coverage; Telemundo follows with 93 percent reach; and TeleFutura has 85 percent.