

# Charities having to pay for TV attention

By Kim Foltz

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The competition for free television time is getting far tougher — in large part because of the glut of public service advertising about drug abuse and AIDS — and many leading charities are being forced to consider paying for broadcast time in order to get their messages on the air.

The American Cancer Society, American Red Cross and other large charities are asking corporations to buy commercial time for public service announcements.

"Just like any business, we have to get a higher return if we're going to be successful," said Joann Schellenbach, a spokeswoman for the American Cancer Society.

The International Business Machines Corp., for example, paid for the recent broadcast of a spot for the United Way of America in the New York area.

And American Airlines is buying commercial time for the Boy Scouts of America, which has begun a \$2 million campaign to bolster its membership.

Some organizations are even using their own money. For instance, the United Way of Central Maryland spent \$500,000 during the last two years to buy time for its commercials on television and radio.

"It was the only way we could be sure of getting on during peak hours in order to reach the best donors," said Mel Tansill, a spokesman for the group.

The strategy is working. Since the paid commercials began in 1988, the amount of money raised has jumped 10 percent, to a record \$30 million.

If paid public service advertising becomes widespread — and most executives at charities think it eventually will — the practice of donated time could disappear.

"We don't want organizations to run paid advertising and also get free time," said Harvey Dzodin, vice president for programs and practices at ABC. "That could shut out less-well-off organizations. We would consider reducing the amount of donated time for any charity paying for ads."

That has many charities worried. "The whole public service market could dry up if we and others start buying time," Schellenbach said.

Still, charities may have to take the risk.

The National Association of Broadcasters estimated that last year more than \$1 billion worth of television time was donated for public service advertising dealing with one cause: substance abuse.

"Drug abuse and AIDS are knocking other causes off the air," said Matthew Margo, vice president for programs and practices at CBS.

"The anti-drug issue receives more time on the air than any other cause," Margo said.

What is more, network executives said, messages about AIDS and drug abuse also get the most coveted time slots during prime-time and daytime programming.

"The hot causes have bumped us to the early-morning hours," said Larry Joyce, a spokesman for the American Heart Association.

The growing number of messages for different causes is also making it more difficult to be noticed. "There's no question that more organizations are approaching the networks for time," Dzodin said.

The industry is trying to accommodate the need.

While the total amount of donated time on television each year cannot be determined, executives at the networks and charitable groups say it has sharply increased in the last several years.

According to the Advertising Council, a clearinghouse for public service advertising, free television time for the dozens of large charities it represents has risen by a third during the last four years to more than \$530 million in 1988.

As it becomes increasingly more difficult to get adequate exposure on broadcast television, charities are turning to cable.

Because there is less demand from advertisers, it is easier for charities to get frequent play during the most-sought-after time periods. As a result, the amount of donated time on cable television has more than doubled in the last four years, to \$67 million in 1988.