

TV station seeks sponsors

BY DAN JANISON
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They won't be calling it "NYC at Nite" just yet — but for the first time, the city's municipal television station is doing something a bit commercial: seeking private sponsors for its programming.

For the past two years, WNYC-TV has been adding low-cost original programming to the standard fare of public hearings and news conferences.

Now, the city's technology agency has requested proposals from "qualified corporations" to underwrite select original productions for the winter 2004 season.

Although the Bloomberg administration generally has been slow to privatize city functions, it has pushed for private grants for schools and parks and sought to market New York City logos for revenue. There is also its controversial move toward broad-based franchis-

ing of newsstands and street advertising.

In that vein, the municipal station — Ch. 74 for the city's Time-Warner Cable franchise — is looking for the kind of low-key sponsorships that appear on the unrelated Public Broadcasting Service stations.

Last year, one firm approached the station about sponsoring the city's traffic-camera broadcast called "City Drive Live," but WNYC officials found they had no mechanism to entertain such an offer.

"There were requests ranging from the semi-formal to the conversational from people asking how to get involved, how to become part of the whole thing," said Arick Wierson, the station's general manager.

The proposals involve three different tiers of proposed support, to include more lucrative support from big financial institutions as well as more affordable spots for small businesses.

The proposals are due Dec. 15.

Viewer surveys showed public familiarity with the station has increased, in tandem with its more varied programming, Wierson added.

The half-dozen shows include the culinary production "What's Cooking at Gracie"; the historical show "Blueprint NYC"; the archival tape show "City Classics"; a consumer show, "\$9.99"; and another called "Fashion in Focus."

As before, the programming includes gavel-to-gavel coverage of City Council hearings and mayoral news conferences and bill signings.

Businesses have been canvassed and proposal requests printed in the City Record, Wierson noted.

Even if ratings rise, neither PBS nor C-SPAN need feel threatened. Wierson said the shows and drive for underwriters is narrowly focused toward businesses specifically identified with the city.