Baiting the hook

Politicos angle for cable exposure as cheap movies lure subscribers

To local politicians, cable television means a chance for image building and "good PR." To the bulk of customers, it means bringing in "R"

rated movies — cheap.

But one thing cable TV is unlikely to mean — lots of

revenue for floor government. In fact, it could even oc costly.

Those views were voiced by two experts who spoke Friday before several dozen public officials in a meeting sponsored by state Rep. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloom-field. Virtually every suburb in Wayne and Oakland coun-ties is pondering a cable TV franchise.

CITIES AND townships granting franchises to cable TV companies expect to get 3 percent or so of the gross. "It really doesn't amount to that much," said Dr. Charles Ruffers and the control of the contr

THE BIG REASON for the explosion of interest in cable TV in suburbia, said Dr. Tom Baldwin, is "uncut

Baldwin, professor of telecommunications at Michigan State University, said customers for movies "are not those who go to movie theaters," adding there is "a pretty good appetite for R movies. That's an issue in many communities."

munities."

Baldwin said about 40 percent of the films shown on cable TV are R rated (usually some nudity and rough language), a slightly lesser proportion are PG (usually some rough language), and is percent are G (all right for young children). Only a small handful are rated X (explicit sex).

For \$1 many parents can and do buy a lockout during

For \$1 many parents can and do buy a lockout device so that children can't turn on objectionable movies.

so that children can't turn on objectionable movies.

CABLE TV is operated by private companies which set up receiving facilities in a community and pipe offerings to houses and institutions by cables strung on utility poles in public rights-of-way menten turns grant franchise.

There are several "iters" of service — conventional channels, public service channels, with local news and governmental meetings that aren't carried by metropoli-

'It's a helluva tremendous public relations tool . . . It cleans up their (governmental meetings) act. And it helps with millage elections.

— Dr. Charles Ruffing, MSU

tan commercial TV; a variety of national channels with movies, sports, ethnic, religious and children's programs; movies and text services such as weather, financial and

movies and text services such as weather, financial and shopping guides. There are even two-way systems. For example, said Baldwin, a home security system could use a channel to transmit burglar alarm or fire signals from a home to the public safely desk of the city. Utility meters could be read the same way. Even political polling can be done, though it wouldn't be a good cross-section of the public statistically. Two-way television, however, is expensive to wire and expensive to install, he said.

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TO EDUCATORS and politicians looking forward to reaching constituents at home, Ruffing had a warning.
"It costs a heliuva lot to put on a TV program. For every one person on camera, there's six behind the camers, and they have to be paid."
That was why, he said, Meridian Township plows back all list franchise fee revenues into the local system. He advised communities to set up study committees that will put in six months of work before the governing body grants a franchise.
"You can't pull the study committee of the street," he said. "You need legal talent. Engineering, Financial. A cross-section of the town — schools, civic clubs, library, police department, fire department."
He also advised spending some money on staff and arravel budget to see what other communities across the country have done.

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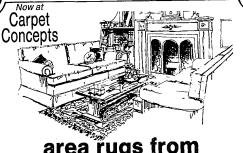
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