

# Call it the Perry template

continued from page 1

"We're in two years where we thought we would be in three to four years," Deb-Mer co-president Mort Marcus said.

The story of "Payne," which has generated more than \$250 million in revenue, began a few years ago when, coming off an overall deal at CBS, Perry approached Debmar-Mercury with a proposition: He would fund a new series if they would find a way to get it on television and get him his money back.

That's how Marcus and Deb-Mer co-president Ira Bernstein came up with the model that is being applied to all their comedy projects.

Perry funded the production of 10 episodes, which Debmar-Mercury gave for free to local stations in key markets and to TBS' WTBS Atlanta for a test run in summer 2006.

An additional 90-episode order by TBS followed, and the series premiered on the cable network in June 2007, followed by a national broadcast-syndication launch in September 2008.

Debmar-Mercury projected to get the first 40 episodes — nearly twice as many as studios produce under the traditional broadcast model — in the first year. Perry, who owns the show, delivered 100 episodes a year instead.

And 172 episodes in, "Payne" is not looking to wrap anytime soon.

"We hope that it will become the most-ordered sitcom in TV history," Bernstein said.

He called the latest pickups by TBS an affirmation of "the value of this groundbreaking sitcom model, which Tyler quickly turned from a dream into a phenomenal success."

Under the model, the creators of comedy series get large ownership in their shows and creative control in exchange for dramatically lowering their fees.

Debmar-Mercury shoulders the initial investment in exchange for access to a syndicable number of episodes in a shorter time frame. Traditionally, studios have to wait at least five years to recoup the money they've put



into deficit-financing their series; Debmar-Mercury hit that milestone in a year.

Meanwhile, the cable network partners get to run a lot of episodes while paying for them over time in annual installments.

Using the "Payne" deal as a blueprint, Perry, Debmar-Mercury and TBS teamed again for "Meet the Browns," which already has crossed the 80-episode mark.

The series rank as ad-supported cable's top two original sitcoms of all time among adults 18-49, viewers and households. This year, new episodes of "Browns" and "Payne" have averaged 3.2 million and 3 million viewers, respectively.

Additionally, Debmar-Mercury recently set up two other cable comedy projects using the same template: a Will Ferrell/Adam McKay sitcom starring Jon Heder at Comedy Central and a series based on Ice Cube's 2005 feature "Are We There Yet?" at TBS.

That means that next year, Deb-Mer will have four sitcoms on the air, rivaling some of the smaller TV studios.

And, with the success of "Payne" and "Browns," more may be coming soon, with talent eager to get in on the action.

"It's like a bakery here," Marcus said. "You come and take a number." **THR**

# TBS brings more 'Payne'

*Cable net gives Perry series 46-episode order*

By Nellie Andreeva

What such sitcoms as "Cheers," "Seinfeld" and "Friends" accomplished in seven or eight seasons, Tyler Perry's "House of Payne" has been able to do in only two years.

TBS has given "Payne" two orders for a total of 46 additional episodes, bringing the series' number to a staggering 172.



Perry

"We have a terrific relationship with Tyler Perry, and this deal means new episodes of 'House of Payne' will continue to air on TBS well into the future," said Michael Wright, head of programming for TBS, TNT and TCM. "Tyler stands alone in the entertainment business today as an entrepreneur who knows his audience."

The orders for 26 and another 20 additional episodes falls into "Payne" distributor Debmar-Mercury's plan to quickly amass a large number of segments for syndication.

But not *that* quickly.

*continued on page 16*