

(July 20, 2007) Editorial: For kids' sake, TV must go a la carte

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A la carte pricing would give cable subscribers meaningful programming choices
By Kevin Martin, Newton N. Minow and Dan Lipinski

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<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/chi-oped0720tvjul20,0,6351310.story>With the click of their remote controls, television viewers today can access some of the best programming ever produced. But as any viewer knows, networks also are offering some of the coarsest programming ever aired. More than 45 years ago, one of the authors of this essay, then-Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton N. Minow, described TV as a "vast wasteland." He noted, "when television is good, nothing -- not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers -- nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse." That statement is truer today than it was back in 1961.

In a recent congressional hearing on the impact of TV violence on children, the senators in attendance were shown a sample of the incredibly violent fare confronting American families in their homes on a regular basis. The senators requested it be turned off before even five minutes had elapsed.

In 1961, the television industry was challenged to improve the vast wasteland of TV programming by giving its audience better, smarter and more interesting content. The greatest challenge for families now is not that there is too little programming to watch. Rather, it is finding family-friendly content in the growing sea of channels that customers must subscribe to in order to receive cable or satellite service.