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HEADLINE: 'STREET' TURNS A CORNER Showtime set to push drama

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BODY:

Scott Cohen, who plays an edgy parole officer on the gritty Showtime drama "**Street Time**," is troubled by the series' lack of exposure.

"We're frustrated with the promotion and marketing budget," Cohen told the Daily News. "I think Showtime has always had a problem with marketing and they don't have enough money for everything."

"**Street Time**" launched a year ago, but never generated the broad buzz of, say, HBO's "The Sopranos."

Some of the problem could be attributed to the smaller reach of Showtime - it has about half of HBO's subscribers. But, as Cohen suggests, it can be blamed partly on the network's weak promotional efforts.

That may change soon, however, when the network launches the second season of "**Street Time**" Wednesday at 10 p.m.

Newly named entertainment president Robert Greenblatt agrees the network has to promote the show harder. "[**Street Time**'] is an excellent show on every level and we have to get the word out about it the old-fashioned way," he said, "market by market, newspaper by newspaper."

The new support comes as producers have tweaked the format to make better use of New York as a backdrop for the show, which is about hard-working parole officers and their clients.

"Having the show set here is a big step," said Richard Stratton, an ex-con and executive producer with Marc **Levin**. "Nowhere else but New York will you find such a range of characters come through a parole office."

Crews began filming exterior scenes around Manhattan earlier this summer and last March, the show's writers moved from Los Angeles to a hip, window-paneled lounge overlooking Chelsea. The cast, however, still shoots the bulk of the show in Toronto.

"The fact that the creative staff has moved to New York means we can make the city another character, just like New Jersey is a character in 'The Sopranos,' " Stratton said.

Stratton's past as a high-volume drug trafficker serves as a blueprint for the series, which stars Rob Morrow as parolee Kevin Hunter.

Cohen stars as James Liberti and Erika Alexander plays supertough parole officer Dee Mulhern. This season, Terrence Dashon Howard joins the cast as supervisor Lucius Mosley.

Initially, the show focused on Hunter, though midway through last season, Liberti and Mulhern took center stage, a trend that carried on into this year.

"I've always felt Dee was more of a con than a cop," said Alexander. "She's very tough, and I enjoy showing the cracks in her facade."

Liberti's rage will flare this year, blurring the line further between his life and that of the ex-cons. "He's truly absorbing his parolees and what they're going through and he learns about himself through these other people," Cohen said of his character. "He gives a voice to the voiceless."

GRAPHIC: UNDEREXPOSED: Scott Cohen and Erika Alexander, stars of Showtime's "**Street Time**"

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