WHILE weather can be mundane, it can also be dramatic, and in that vein two cable television networks are joining forces to promote special, related programs on both channels this month.

The unusual joint venture involves the A&E Network, which is presenting "Shackleton," a two-part, four-hour movie about a famous expedition to the South Pole in 1914, and the Weather Channel, which is presenting a five-part, five-hour program titled "StormWeek," about severe weather conditions.

The joint cross-promotional campaign, with an estimated budget of $10 million, is indicative of efforts being made in the crowded cable television universe to attract viewers to special programming. It comes after media conglomerates like the Walt Disney Company (news/quote), the News Corporation (news/quote) and Viacom Inc. (news/quote) have been using their expansive holdings to promote shows among their various properties.

For instance, A&E, which is owned in part by the ABC unit of Disney, is rerunning the daytime talk show "The View" the day after it appears on ABC. A&E, which is also owned by the Hearst Corporation and the NBC division of General Electric (news/quote), cross-promotes with a sibling, the History Channel.

"In this day and age, where competition is so great, networks can't isolate themselves," said Michael Mohamad, senior vice president for marketing at A&E in New York. "They're going to have to reach outside for — I hate to say this, I'm not corny — `out-of-the-box' opportunities."

"Little bits and pieces of your audience are going to different places because there are so many different special-interest networks," he added. "Now, you really need to get your message out there as broadly as you can."

Executives at A&E and the Weather Channel said they recognized that because the two networks shared an audience of men and women ages 25 to 54, it would make sense to promote weather-related programming on both networks.
"Shackleton," which will be shown on Sunday and Monday, is a dramatization of the South Pole expedition led by Sir Ernest H. Shackleton, portrayed by Kenneth Branagh, in which he and his crew survived gales and ice floes that trapped and crushed his ship.

"StormWeek," which returned on Monday for a second year, focuses on weather extremes like tornadoes and blizzards. The episodes will include a new segment meant to take viewers into the eye of a storm; there will also be additional film on the Weather Channel Web site, weather.com.

Cross-promotion can also be cost-effective.

"We're in the middle of a media recession," said Steve Schiffman, executive vice president for marketing at the Weather Channel in Atlanta, which is owned by Landmark Communications (news/quote). "It wasn't like we had inflated budgets where we had extra resources at our disposal to build awareness of various programming initiatives."

The cross-network campaign encourages viewers to tune in to both programs with a television commercial as well as efforts online that include banner ads and links between the Weather Channel site and the A&E site, www.AandE.com.

In addition, Paul Kocin, a Weather Channel winter-storm expert, will talk about the conditions Sir Ernest faced in "Making of Shackleton" on A&E, and Charles Sturridge, the writer and director of "Shackleton," will be interviewed on the Weather Channel's Web site.

The channels, which will also have independent campaigns for their programs, worked with the New York office of the GEM Group, owned by CSS Stellar, to ensure the promotion was fairly balanced. A banner ad on the Weather Channel's Web site, for example, is not equivalent to a banner ad on the A&E Web site because weather.com has far more unique users each month. Similarly, a 30-second spot is more valuable on A&E than on the Weather Channel.

The partnership between A&E and the Weather Channel was a long time in coming. Mr. Mohamad and Mr. Schiffman had talked about a similar effort a few years ago, when A&E was beginning "Horatio Hornblower," a film about an 18th-century British naval officer.

"The timing wasn't right," Mr. Mohamad said.

Then, last July, Mr. Mohamad and Mr. Schiffman attended a conference in San Francisco for the Cable and Telecommunications Association for Marketing and were seated next to each other at a dinner also attended by John Zamoiski, president at the GEM Entertainment unit of GEM.

Mr. Mohamad started talking about "Shackleton," Mr. Schiffman said, and "beautiful music happened" because the movie was so closely related to the weather. Soon afterward, executives from both networks held a meeting and conference call to start the project.
"It was like one big blind date," Mr. Schiffman said, adding that they exchanged e-mail addresses and phone numbers.

The two networks are discussing future cross-promotions and are open to similar partnerships with other networks.

Though they still track results like ratings to see how successful the cross-promotion is, the executives are pleased.

"We just had lunch last week," Mr. Mohamad said, "to congratulate ourselves."