

TV PRODUCTION

Screen savers

Government is urged to offer incentives to the local production industry

The launch of two new television channels in SA by Discovery Networks could be a much-needed stimulus to the struggling local production industry.

The company recently announced the launch of the channels ID: Investigation Discovery and TLC, which is directed towards female viewers. Of Discovery's 10 channels, six are now available in SA. These include Animal Planet, Discovery

World, Discovery HD Showcase and the flagship Discovery Channel. All six are aired on DStv; TopTV offers three.

The industry has been in difficulties since the SABC's announcement in 2009 that it would shrink its budget for local productions.

Phillip Luff, Discovery Networks' country manager for emerging business in Central & Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa, says the increased focus on Africa will eventually lead to the company opening an office in SA.

"We're keen to support the SA production industry," Luff says. But any potential new ventures will be considered cautiously. "The benefit of recession is that people stay home and don't go out as much. They end up watching more television."

Luff says he will seek to reach more African viewers. The US subsidiary contributed US\$1,2bn to group revenue in the six months to June 2011, compared with \$691m from Discovery Networks International, of which Africa makes up a small portion.

Though Discovery shoots much of its content in Africa, most of the output is generated in the US by its production and development unit.

"One of my key focus areas is to understand black audiences," says Luff. "Discovery World tends to be a bit white [-orientated]. I think there are opportunities to attract more black audiences."

Wadim Schreiner, MD of media analysis specialist Media Tenor, says lack of finance is hindering the ability of local TV channels to develop better content. "The phenomenon we are experiencing is not a particularly SA one," he says. "The squeeze on creating good content is a global problem."

"The cost of producing something is a lot bigger than buying a product off the

shelf. But if we don't invest in local production we won't escape the unsustainable situation of being reliant on international content."

Schreiner says government needs a policy initiative targeting the commercial production industry, similar to the Media Development & Diversity Agency,

launched in 2002 to develop community media.

"Government has made efforts to support and develop entrepreneurs in the production industry, which is expensive," he says. "But it's becoming increasingly difficult for smaller [com-

mercial] production companies to establish their own channels of funding. Everything is run by a few large corporations that dictate what content we get and at what price."

US media commentator Bob Garfield offers a bleak future for TV production.

He was in SA recently to address a digital marketing conference and says free Internet content has seriously harmed the production industry.

"Working in production for 30-second TV commercials or in traditional print media is like being a cobbler in the 1930s," he says. "A revolution is taking place."

Zweli Mokgata

WHAT IT MEANS

- ▶ Network plans to launch SA office
- ▶ Internet seen as death knell for traditional media



Robbie Tchabazile

Philip Luff
Keen to support SA

CORRECTION

In last week's FM (*Media & Advertising* October 14) we reported that a campaign for Oude Meester brandy was developed by Net#work BBDO Cape Town, and identified Mike Schalit as chief creative officer of Net#work BBDO SA. The campaign was actually the work of 140 BBDO and Schalit is CCO of BBDO SA. ■