

The evolution of Discovery in Africa

 By Louise Marsland

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Discovery Inc is investing further in the African broadcast content market through diversification and a multi-partner model. Bizcommunity.Africa talks about the evolution of Discovery Inc and its Africa focus with the new general manager for the Middle East and Africa (MEA), Amanda Turnbull.



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What is Discovery focusing on in Africa - top imperatives?

Africa has been an important market for Discovery for over 20 years and one which we have always seen huge growth potential in. As part of our strategy to unlock this growth, this year we are focusing on making the pivot to become a multi-platform, multi-partner proposition where diversification is essential. This is a shift we're bringing into action across all aspects of our business, starting with our ad sales where we have a triple play strategy: Earlier this year we formed a new partnership with Viacom International Media Networks Africa to drive our ad performance across Discovery Channel, TLC, ID and Discovery Family.

Meanwhile we continue to work with our long-term partner DSTV Media Sales which represents Food Network and Travel Channel. And finally, we are also actively pursuing opportunities to grow our ad sales footprint outside of South Africa with Real Time. With this new model, we hope to combine the power of our globally-loved brands with the expertise of our local partners to increase the scale of our ad sales business across the continent.

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From a channel perspective, we have also made steps to diversify our core pay-TV business and have just launched a new female general entertainment channel, Real Time which is our first free DTH/DTT channel in Africa. Currently available on DSTV in South Africa, Real Time will also launch across Africa later this year on the StarTimes platform (including StarSat in South Africa), unlocking access to an entirely new audience base who have yet to enjoy our globally popular content.

The launch of Real Time represents the first step on our journey to transform our African content distribution strategy, as we evolve to become a provider of must-watch and must-have programming across all platforms, screens and services – from pay, free-TV and digital.

■ **What is Discovery Inc.'s focus in Africa, which is a mobile-first continent?**

With the diverse and complex nature of the African market, our strategy has been to find the right local partners who can help us navigate through these complexities – marrying the power of our content with the reach of a third party to generate scale and sustainability. This is something we've been exploring over recent years, and we are currently working on a separate digital product to launch with an African telco which will allow us to reach even more consumers in the mobile environment, details of which we hope to announce soon.

■ **What are your plans for streaming services?**

Globally, we are evolving to become a direct-to-consumer business, with the ability to launch new streaming services centred around globally popular genres. In Europe, our sports OTT product Eurosport Player is quickly becoming one of the fastest growing sports streaming services in the market, while in the US, MotorTrend, our latest on-demand platform for turbo fans, is the #1 digital media platform in the US for automotive. Now, thanks to our recent acquisition of Scripps Interactive Networks, we are a stronger and more differentiated media company, with an expanded portfolio of brands across all major genres that makes us uniquely positioned to own thematic and scalable verticals across linear and digital.

In Africa, our linear channels reach an audience of millions with strong communities of super-fans, so we know there's an appetite for our content in the market. Our hope is to leverage the popularity of our networks and find the right partner that will enable us to broaden their reach into the digital ecosystem, and ultimately bring our content to more audiences across Africa, wherever and however they wish to consume it.

■ **How does Discovery collaborate with African-based broadcasters?**

We've been working closely with African broadcasters for years and it's thanks to these partnerships that our channels have become so successful with audiences across the continent. This year, we are actively exploring opportunities to expand our existing partnership, as well as form new ones, in order to bring our content and channels to more consumers.

In terms of recent collaborations, this year we strengthened our channel portfolio on DStv, launching HD feeds for all our channels, expanding our VOD and TVE offering for their catch-up and DStv Now platforms and, most recently, launching Real Time in South Africa for their EasyView customers. We also recently signed a renewal with StarTimes, which will not only see the roll out of Real Time across the wider continent later this year, but will also see us launch Discovery Family on their platform too, a channel which has proven particularly successful with South African audiences.

On top of this, we are also in discussions with our other African broadcast partners, to ensure they have the right mix of channels for their subscriber base and, where possible, explore ways that content from our flagship brands, including Discovery Channel and TLC, can be enjoyed by as many fans across the continent as possible.

■ What new programming is in the pipeline for African audiences?

We have a strong line-up of documentary specials, returning favourites and new formats over the next few months across our channels that we know our viewers will love. Firstly, to mark the 60th anniversary of NASA, in October Discovery Channel will celebrate the occasion with a week of Space-themed programmes, the highlight of which will be the one-off documentary special *Above & Beyond: NASA's Journey to Beyond*, directed by the niece of JFK, Rory Kennedy.

October will also see the return of Discovery Channel fan-favourites *Gold Rush* and *Running Wild with Bear Grylls*. On TLC, Buddy Valastro returns in November in the brand-new format, *Buddy's Big Bakedown*, a series which challenges teams of America's most talented bakers and cake artists to the ultimate baking competition, while the hugely popular franchise *90 Day Fiancé* also returns in November, as even more international couples take a gamble on a cross-border romance - for better or worse.

Also, in November; ID looks into the shocking murder of fashion designer Gianni Versace, in *People Magazine Investigates* and there are big parties and even bigger dresses on Real Time in *Sweet 15: Quinceañera*. Looking further ahead, in early 2019 talented celebrity chef Siba Mtongana will return to Food Network with a brand-new series featuring even more culinary treats that will prove why she's the queen of South African cuisine.

■ How do you want local content producers to collaborate?

When investing in new content and speaking to local content producers, it's crucial we identify programming that fits with our core channel brands and will resonate with our local audience. This year, we've had particular success with local shows *Thando Bares All* on TLC, and more recently, *Hitched* on Discovery Channel.

Produced by Johannesburg production company Oxyg3n Media and hosted by the hugely popular Thando Thabethe, *Thando Bares All* was the perfect fit for TLC thanks to each episode focusing on a core TLC genre – from body positivity to alternative lifestyles – and our viewers loved it too, with the show ranking as one of our most highly rated shows in May and June. In August we premiered the travel documentary *Hitched* on Discovery Channel, which was made by Durban-based production company Tomfoolery. With its depiction of the ultimate adventure and coming-of-age story, *Hitched* not only rated well, but brought in a younger audience, thanks to its two intrepid young protagonists, Luke MacDonald and Jordan Deall.



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Local content has also been a staple of the Food Network and Travel Channel schedules, with shows including *Siba's Table*, *Ultimate Braai Master* and *Durban Beach Rescue* proving a success thanks to their localisation of the formats and themes Food Network and Travel Channel viewers want and expect.

As well as working with established content producers, we have also been making efforts to grow local talent and invest in African filmmakers through our partnership with the Jozi Film Festival and 'Discovery Channel Don't Stop Wondering Award', now in its 2nd year, which acknowledges short-form filmmakers and celebrates local African stories.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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