

Old but New



Avi Himatsinghani and Sandie Lee, two television veterans who collectively bring together a wealth of TV experience from both regional broadcaster and pay-TV operator's perspectives, have launched a new channel that is set to challenge the current mantra that "first and exclusive" is always better. Jia Ling KOH provides this snapshot of the new channel that is HITS.

Channel description

HITS is a basic channel service that brings the proven best TV shows all on one channel, in never-before-seen HD quality. The channel began in November 2013 and is currently available in Singapore.

Sandie Lee, VP & Channel Head of Rewind Networks, says: "It's not truly a retro, classic channel. We don't have black and white shows on our channel. We find what is best from the '80s to '00s. That's why you see older shows like *Different Strokes* and *The Cosby Show*, but you also have *Criminal Minds*, *Lost*, and *Seinfeld*, so we try to find what will appeal to audiences of today and we try not to alienate them by going too far back."

Origin of the channel

The team at Rewind Networks saw a gap in the pay-TV market whose mainstay is offering "first and exclusive" content, but not past hit shows.

"There's a whole generation of new TV viewers that have probably missed out on these fantastic shows altogether, or they watched them when they were on small TV screens syndicated through their free-to-air stations, which is very different from the way they watch TV today," explains former FOX International Channels GM Avinash Himatsinghani, now CEO of Rewind Networks. "Viewers want to be able to watch it on-demand, they want to be able to watch it daily... There was nothing like this out there. And we felt there's a market need – maybe a latent need – but we will tap into it and give it to the people."

Target audience

The channel has a broad target demographic age group of 25 – 60, which the team says is rare. "The older you are, you'll remember these shows. The younger you are, you probably weren't watching TV when these shows were on. So our target age group is quite wide. Of course we have a primary focus, which is maybe 30 – 55, and then for the secondary focus, we hope that with word-of-mouth, we can get younger or older people to watch these shows," says Lee.

Scheduling policy

Unlike channels that start at odd timings, like 10 minutes to the hour, Lee says that HITS uses an intuitive schedule that starts on the hour or the half hour, which is easy to remember. It is "stripped" on weekdays in almost every timeslot, which encourages appointment viewing; with weekend "stacks" to encourage weekend "catch ups" for the episodes one might have missed during the weekdays. The programming mix is a combination of comedies and dramas, with a heavier emphasis on comedies on weekends.



The cast of Cheers

"We feel that on weekends, it's not easy to get people to watch TV in the first place. They are always out. So if you put a comedy, with the likelihood of them coming in and going out, it's easier for them to handle," says Lee.

Distribution in Asia

While the channel is currently distributed only in Singapore (on StarHub TV), HITS has acquired content rights to 13 territories. Their plan is to go out to much of Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan; with Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam as key markets for further distribution, but not discounting smaller markets like Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Macau. The channel is operating out of a single feed on Intelsat 19.

Key tiers

HITS is positioning itself as a basic tier channel. Himatsinghani explains that one of the challenges operators face is they want to keep enhancing the value of their basic offering, especially when they are enticing new subscribers.

"It's easier to sell (to subscribers) a known show than saying 'Watch this show, it's a new show from the U.S.', but customers don't have a connection to it. Those are multiple levels that this channel's proposition is working for the operators," says Himatsinghani.

Online, VOD, SVOD or mobile deals

HITS, together with other linear channels on StarHub, is available on StarHub TV Anywhere, the multiscreen-friendly linear stream. A catchup on-demand service, called HITS Replay, is due to launch in April 2014, and HITS is also developing an app for the same service that is available on set-top boxes to be made available on multiple devices.

Upcoming shows

Cheers and *Grey's Anatomy* are slated to premiere end of February on HITS. TVApplus



From left: Sandie Lee and Avi Himatsinghani