



Africa's Biggest TV Market Opens for Business

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By Christopher Vourlia

Africa's biggest TV content market returned to Ivory Coast May 31 for a three-day event bringing together buyers, sellers, producers, and industry influencers from more than 60 countries.

Business event organizer Basic Lead expect more than 1,200 delegates to attend the 12th edition of Discop Africa, which takes place today through June 2 at the Sofitel Abidjan Hotel Ivoire Hotel in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. It's a turnout that goes "beyond our expectations" in just the second edition for the West African nation, according to Basic Lead general manager Patrick Zuchowicki.

Eight years after hosting its inaugural edition, Discop Africa has grown into a twice-yearly event, with a second market in Johannesburg, South Africa, slated for Nov. 2-4 this year. With organizers estimating the African TV sector to be worth \$1 billion a year, Zuchowicki says the message from both local and international bizzers is clear.

"Africa needs two markets a year," he says.

The Abidjan edition TV kicks off at a time of optimism across the continent, which has witnessed a steadily growing middle-class over the past decade. Pay-TV subscription numbers continue to rise, even as the ongoing digital migration – which has progressed unevenly across Africa – offers the prospect of a billion viewers with access to affordable TV.

Ivory Coast, notes Zuchowicki, stands out, with progressive TV legislation and an ambitious broadcaster investing heavily in its distribution arm.

"There's a lot of movement, and there's a lot of creativity," he says. "It is a dynamic regional hub with a sound environment."

It also speaks to growing interest in the Francophone region. With close to 300 million French speakers on the continent, Zuchowicki says he sees "more Anglophone players coming into French-speaking Africa, looking at what they can do to penetrate that marketplace."

Abidjan is poised to be at the center of the action. More than a decade after the last shots were fired in Ivory Coast's disastrous civil war, new life – and investment – has poured into the country's economic hub. Interest from the likes of Lagardere and the Canal Plus Group, which in 2014 established the headquarters of its new premium pan-African entertainment channel in Abidjan, has only cemented hopes that a city once dubbed "the Paris of West Africa" can again become a business hub for the Francophone region.

The 12th edition of Discop Africa will host international sellers offering a broad slate of films, series, docs, formats, sports programming and children's content, as well as the world's largest selection

of content created in Africa. Foreign buyers are also be in attendance, with programming and acquisitions execs representing a range of African distribution platforms, from pubcasters and pay-TV operators to rapidly growing mobile networks and just-launched VOD platforms.

After focusing exclusively on buyers and sellers in last year's Abidjan edition, the event this year includes roughly 200 independent producers, with workshops and matchmaking sessions, alongside a pitching competition, geared toward unlocking investment for a generation of African creatives.

"We're trying to identify funding sources for these young producers [and] help them monetize their content," says Zuchowicki, who notes that foreign media groups, ad agencies and brand managers are also in attendance in Abidjan.

The goal, he says, is "to have more advertisers putting more money into formats and branded entertainment, and make sure some of that goes into developing and producing independent content," he says. "Despite the fact that the market is growing, it hasn't reached the mature level yet. We need to make sure that the marketplace is ready to move to the next step."