



## **Discop: The Africa Channel Eyes U.S. Viewers**

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By Christopher Vourlia

**The Africa Channel airs a same-day feed of the South African morning show 'Expresso'**

As Discop Africa wrapped its 11th edition Nov. 6 in Johannesburg, the focus turned to 2016, when the continent's biggest TV content market travels to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, from May 31-June 2, before returning to South Africa in November.

For the next Johannesburg edition, the spotlight will be on the U.S. as a guest country, with a robust American presence — which this year included Disney, Turner, Viacom and others — looking to take part in a rapidly growing market worth an estimated \$1 billion, according to organizer Basic Lead.

It also offers a chance to bring more African content to American viewers.

“There aren't many outlets in the U.S. that [have] ... Afro-centric content,” said Narendra Reddy, senior VP of programming and production for the Africa Channel.

With a mission to “present a contemporary view of African life,” Reddy said, the Africa Channel was launched in 2005 for audiences “tired of coverage of Africa [presented] in a sensational way.”

“The point of view was always negative,” he said. “Meanwhile there's a continent where life goes on.”

For the first few years, the Africa Channel experienced growing pains; Reddy acknowledged that it was widely seen as a “dumping ground” for African content that couldn't get sold on other U.S. networks.

Since rebranding in 2013 as a lifestyle channel, though, it's been more focused on acquiring and producing premium content.

Building a catalog hasn't been easy; with most African content still shot in SD, Reddy said the Africa Channel has almost exclusively licensed its programming from South Africa, where HD has been more widely adopted by producers.

But that's also opened up opportunities for the channel to produce its own content from elsewhere on the continent, allowing it not only to broadcast premium programming to auds in North America, but to sell it to global players like Canal Plus, who showed interest in the company's 400 hours of content at Discop.

This year, for the first time, it also aired a same-day feed of the popular South African morning show “Expresso,” offering auds what Reddy described as a chance “to wake up to a piece of Africa.”

Now the network is looking to plant its footprint on the very continent that inspired it, exploring pay-TV carriage deals with South Africa’s DStv and China’s StarTimes, as well as syndication possibilities with BET Africa and South African pubcaster SABC.

Reddy said Discop Africa offered a host of new possibilities for the network, including a chance to work with content creators who fully engaged in bringing their shows to the world.

“If the producers have a vested interest in the show...it takes a lot of pressure off the network having to do all the work of promoting it,” he say. “I like that kind of thinking.”