

Africans eager for new ways of accessing TV content

Independent production house Rapid Blue says there is an abundance of television content opportunities waiting to be seized on the African continent - especially in the digital sphere. This emerged after the company participated in the recent [DISCOP Africa](#) film and television market.

Regarded as the most important industry gathering dedicated to the business, production and distribution of multi-screen television content in Africa, DISCOP 2012 took place from 31 October to 2 November 2012 in Johannesburg, South Africa; attracted more than 700 international companies seeking to buy and sell film, television series, documentaries, formats and other broadcast content.

As one of Africa's most active production companies, with branches in South Africa, Nigeria and Angola, Rapid Blue had extensive presence at the market with a view to further expanding its footprint in Africa.

"We built and maintained relationships across the programming and television format side of our business, with a lot of interest in the international formats we manage," said Rapid Blue CEO and executive producer Duncan Irvine, referring to titles the Emmy Award-winning company produces such as SA's Got Talent and Nigeria's Got Talent, as well as Come Din With Me SA and Nigerian Idols.

Growing area of branded entertainment

"But more importantly," he added, "we made important inroads elsewhere - such as in the growing area of branded entertainment. There is a definite movement towards branded content, instead of entertainment funded by broadcasters or advertisers, and we're excited about new opportunities that are opening up to work with brands to create TV programmes.

"It's a far more immersive process that entails understanding a brand and integrating it into a show. We've been tracking this trend around the world, and at DISCOP a lot of the sessions revolved around branded content. The continent is still playing catch-up in that area."

Irvine said that Rapid Blue's division dealing with on-air promotion and design also attracted extensive interest, but the most leads were generated by the company's recently launched digital division, Rapid Blue Digital. Africa, it would seem, is hungry to explore more innovative content opportunities through online and mobile platforms.

Rapid Blue Digital was launched in June to support the parent company with digital content and strategy solutions that invite audience interaction across "screens" - from television and computer to tablet and mobile. Its focus is not limited to digital creative work but extends to the division's capacity to build its own applications and bring its own products to market. Already, Rapid Blue Digital has exceeded its initial targets and has done work for clients such as Telkom, Nedbank and Media 24.

'Mobile-centric' Africa

Its managing director, Brett Levy, who has spent 15 years immersed in the digital arena, said that Africa is becoming increasingly "mobile-centric" when it comes to producing content. However, he pointed out that South Africa is unquestionably the continental hub for development and innovation in this area.

"Rapid Blue has developed its own augmented reality app, and our stand at DISCOP had an entire wall that came to life through this innovation, which was a real drawcard. It blew people away." The application uses image recognition technology that brings a flat print image to impressive digitised life.

Levy said the company is in the early stages of negotiation with an African partner to explore internet protocol-based television content delivery options.

Rapid Blue (working with Basic Lead the organisers of Discop) also helped fund and judge the formats competition at DISCOP, which was geared at identifying and giving a platform to new homegrown shows. Three winners - two from Kenya and one from South Africa - each received \$2500 in prize money to help develop their formats further. Rapid Blue has also undertaken to assist the winners in taking their formats to the international market.

"Rapid Blue is sometimes perceived as producing mainly international formats, which is not true," said Irvine. "We develop new local shows as well, and are continually looking to create shows that become international formats."

Irvine said that across its various divisions, Rapid Blue had discussions at the trade fair amounting to roughly R20 million in potential new business - across both "old-school" and "new-school" technologies, from programming and formats to digital. "We're very excited about the potential for non-traditional ways of transmitting content, such as mobile, subscription-based and video on demand, which is huge in Nigeria and the diaspora."

"It was a very productive conference, with a bunch of opportunities identified that, we hope, will enable us to capitalise on our capacity and our existing access to African markets, and expand it further."

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