

It's Africa's time in film

Africa is a land of storytelling, ambitious talent and outstanding filming facilities. Its time has come to make a mark on international drama.



Alex Okosi.

So, what will it need to play a leading role in the international marketplace? **Alex Okosi**, executive vice president and managing director, Viacom International Media Networks Africa and managing director of BET International, is betting on the continent's potential and on the pioneers driving the next generation of African drama.

■ Can you tell us a bit about VIMN's operations in Africa, key channels and reach?

As a multimedia entertainment powerhouse VIMN Africa offers the most comprehensive international broadcast portfolio on the African continent, reaching more than 100 million viewers across 48 territories in Africa. VIMN Africa currently comprises 10 separate TV channels and five consumer websites, as well as multiple mobile and social media sites. The company's African business interests include content production and distribution; spot sales, 360-degree sponsorships, events, mobile, digital and consumer products.

■ What shows work well for you on the continent?

We are the only broadcast platform that carries such a breadth of leading international award shows and all are at the cutting edge of what our audiences are looking to experience – the most influential local and international stars, music and shows. We balance these international shows with a host of locally commissioned programmes and of course have the continent's leading awards show as well – the MAMA.

Content that works in local markets carries local cultural and social relevance. We have a continent which is rich in social diversity and culture and where countries are wanting content in local languages that resonates with them culturally. We've approached this in two ways: youth which is music and pop culture; and then pro-social issues which are relevant across the continent.

▣ What's your strategy on origination - what kind of shows do you make?

We focus on developing stories that relate to youth where characters are diverse and have appeal in country and across the region. Cross country casting allows for character relation development across diverse audiences. Music is another where awards shows, as passion point, allows us to speak to the youth in a quality format which they relate to and is exciting to watch and triggers engagement for them to participate in and share.

Our locally created MTV Africa Music Awards (MAMA) has grown in impact, reach and stature and is now the leading awards event on the continent and in fact the only one of its kind. MAMA delivers to a massive audience and significant participation and engagement around voting. What is important is that we have taken contemporary African culture to a global audience but also more that it has been a catalyst for a continental musical conversation with a number of collaborations emerging from the awards. It has provided an opportunity for artists to break through internationally. These artists embody our manifestation of Africa reimaged.

▣ Do you think we're at the point where African content can start travelling around the world as complete shows or formats?

If you look at our market where there are say, 25 shows, 22 of those are local therefore creating diverse content for Africa is key. We truly have success when we create the link through pro social, pop culture and music - it then carries across the continent. MTV Shuga is a great example of our on-going investment in the production and film industry in Africa. Not only is impact economic but also social as the programming empowers our audiences, which is an important part of VIMN Africa's mission. Currently in its 6th instalment in Nigeria at the moment, the series originally cast Lupita and helped place her on a global stage. We currently have plans to take MTV SHUGA to both Egypt and India where audiences there share similar pro social issues. MTV SHUGA is a great example of where the format and story line resonates globally.

▣ Where do you think African content creators excel - are there particular genres or style that the continent's talent excels in?

Our future is becoming more customised, while quality is always key, authenticity is even more pronounced, especially as the forms and the appetite for local content grows. The more content that travels across the continent, the more a concerted approach is required. Nollywood is anomaly at the moment. Dramas will always be a vehicle to drive audience engagement.

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