

Four BBC Worldwide channels for DStv

BBC Worldwide Channels, in partnership with MultiChoice Africa, has said that it will launch four new channels - BBC Entertainment, BBC Lifestyle, BBC Knowledge and BBC CBeebies - from September 2008 on the DStv platform to replace and build upon the success of its existing channels, BBC Prime and BBC Food. The announcement was made yesterday, Tuesday 10 June, at the Saxon Hotel in Sandhurst, Johannesburg.

 By [Issa Sikiti da Silva](#) 11 Jun 2008

“After conducting an intensive research, we found that audiences are strongly connected with the BBC brand in Africa,” Dean Possenniskie, BBC Worldwide SVP and GM for Europe, Middle East and Africa, said.

“Significant investment”

“Africa has always been of great importance to us, and we are now making a significant investment as we launch four dedicated channel feeds for Africa. This new deal with MultiChoice confirms our commitment to the territory and allows us to deliver a greater range of contemporary, award-winning programming across four channel genres to loyal BBC viewers, in addition to attracting new ones.”

BBC Entertainment will replace BBC Prime and is set to showcase comedy, drama and light entertainment programming from the BBC and other UK production houses.

BBC Lifestyle, which will replace BBC Food, is a destination offering inspiration for home, family and life. The channel dishes up six tasty strands to engage and inspire viewers. Favourite African series, once on BBC Food, will now broadcast in Food. The other lifestyle strands include Home & Design, Fashion & Style, Health, Parenting and Personal Development.

Through programmes such as Science & Technology and Business, BBC Knowledge will provide non-fiction and factual entertainment material and explore new cultures around the world. The Past will bring historical events, places and people back to life.

Educational entertainment

BBC CBeebies is a pre-school channel for children aged 0-6 years and will emphasise on educational entertainment.

Pressed by Bizcommunity.com to disclose the financial costs of such a huge project, Possenniskie said: “Look, come September, we will sign a five-year contract with MultiChoice and if you were to take account of the 2 500 hours of programming every year, it could amount to an estimated £50 million (about R750 million) over the next five years.”

Since the awarding of new licences to upcoming pay TV players by ICASA last year, MultiChoice has been hard at work, restructuring its DStv contents and adding a variety of new programmes, and yesterday's BBC Worldwide announcement fairly supplements that philosophy. It appears that the strategy's aim is to flex DStv's muscles and sharpen its defence as stiff competition from other players looms in what many observers see as a very unpredictable market.

But MultiChoice Africa GM for content, Aletta Alberts, flatly denied that the strategy had something to do with competition. “No, it is not about that. These things have been planned long time ago. We are just adding value on our platform to satisfy our audiences, and we strongly believe that BBC Worldwide being one of the world's biggest entertainment players will definitely bring a new flavour with these exciting programmes.”

13th year of partnership

Alberts also told Bizcommunity.com that MultiChoice's partnership with BBC goes a long way back - it is now in its 13th year.

Asked about the challenges that emerge as the broadcaster brings such an expensive and complex project in Africa in general and SA in particular, John Taite, BBC Worldwide director of programming for Europe, Middle East and Africa, said: “We've handpicked the programmes and designed the channels specifically for our African audience. The challenge will be creating an African feel so our viewers come to think of them as their BBC channels.”

Taite said that his company has been consulting with the SA production community in terms of ‘evolving’ the UK channel into localised content by bringing local faces into the channel.

BBC Worldwide Channels is a fully-owned subsidiary of the UK public broadcaster BBC, which was established in 1922. Asked whether, BBC Worldwide does get some funding from the state as it is the case all over the world, Possenniskie replied: “No. We do not get funds from anyone. Instead, we generate our own revenues which go into the coffers of our parent company.”

Created only two and half years ago, BBC Worldwide has already launched programmes in India, Poland, Singapore, and now in Africa.

For more information, go to www.bbcworldwide.com.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

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