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## New Linear Hits Channel To Mimic OTT Viewing

Hits, a new channel from Singapore-based startup Rewind Networks, aims to replicate an over-the-top (OTT) viewing experience for pay-TV subscribers.

The channel – which will carry complete runs of hit shows such as *Seinfeld*, *The Cosby Show*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Lost* – will make its debut in Singapore during December, on StarHub's basic tier in HD and SD, before expanding distribution into Malaysia in 2014.

Carriage in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines is also likely over the course of next year.

Hits has been designed to fill a gap for long-tail content, steering clear of competition for exclusive, first-run, day-and-date shows, explains Rewind CEO Avi Himatsinghani, citing the success of OTT service Netflix in the US.

"We think Hits can enhance operators' basic entry packs across the region," Himatsinghani says, speaking in an interview with *Asia Media Journal*.

"There is room for growth in mature markets, where high-speed broadband is a real factor but pay-TV can still grow its pie," he adds.

"There is also room in emerging markets, where operators want viable differentiated product at attractive prices that speak to a new generation of consumers, but at much cheaper prices than before."



Himatsinghani: 'Far from a library play'

### Convenient content

Himatsinghani, formerly of Fox International Channels, has tasked Sandie Lee, a veteran of Singapore's StarHub and MediaCorp, to curate the content and schedule for Hits as a VP of the business and channel head.

Shows will air at the same time every weekday, and will be available in stacks on weekends.

OTT and catch-up windows meanwhile will not be monetized separately, as part of a free value-add for both operators and subscribers.

In addition to the linear channel, Hits will be available online through authenticated simulcast. An authenticated catch-up service, accessed via the set-top box as well as online, will be added in early 2014.

"This is very much in line with how people watch TV today, which is binge viewing," Lee says. "They don't want to wait all week to watch their favorite shows."

Many of the shows have been repurposed for HD, which Lee believes will drive ratings for the channel as viewers get the chance to see popular shows on widescreens in HD.

Content partners include CBS, Carsey-Werner, Disney, Fox, NBCU and Sony.

### Future growth

"There is a clear need today in the Asian pay-TV space for a strongly curated and programmed entertainment offering, that offers the best of TV all in one place as a viable branded destination," Himatsinghani says.

Hits is such a product because it has an exclusive multi-year pipeline to some of the best TV content produced over the past thirty years. It's "far from being a library content play", he contends.

In the future, the Hits brand may also expand into event-based programming, with discussions

ongoing around sports, live music and some kids franchises.

The channel is targeting 10 million subscribers by early 2015, and break even after three years.

Affiliate fees from basic tier carriage will represent the bulk of revenues, though local ad sales will also gain some importance over time.

Local ad revenue will be shared with operators, who will place the majority of airtime with a small proportion retained for regional promotions.

Quickly securing cash flow through affiliate deals will be important for Hits to be sustainable.

Another key test will be how the channel rates in its initial markets.

“As a single-channel network, we have to work harder to build the brand,” Himatsinghani admits.

“But that only pushes us to take a stronger packaging and curation strategy to stand out.”

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