

channels



Hits is not a me-too, it's a me-first. Why are platforms taking it? Because there's nothing else like it out there."

Avi Himatsinghani, Chief Executive, Rewind Networks



Hit rate

When Asia's newest channel, Hits, goes live out of Singapore on 9 December, the region gets a first-of-its-kind service that taps a trend set by Netflix in the U.S. for big-brand well-loved content... but without any need to exit the pay-TV eco-system. And with a twist designed to solve at least one – and maybe a few – of the biggest issues facing Asia's pay-TV platforms.

Hits' proposition is "television's greatest hits all in one destination", and the schedule cherry-picks the best-performing U.S. comedy and drama in Asia over the past two decades.

The launch schedule includes iconic titles such as *Seinfeld*, *Lost*, *The Cosby Show*, *Diff'rent Strokes*, *Golden Girls*, *Moonlighting* and *Criminal Minds*. Coming-soon comedy and drama titles include *Cheers*, *The A-Team*, *Murder She Wrote*, *M*A*S*H**, *The X-Files*, *The Wonder Years*, *Married With Children*, *Taxi* and *Star Trek – The Next Generation*. Multiple-season content deals signed so far are with Disney/ABC, 20th Century Fox, Sony Pictures Television, CBS Studios, NBC Universal and Carsey Werner.

"I believe there's room for strong growth in Asia's traditional pay-TV environment," says Hits' founder and chief executive, Avi Himatsinghani. "But the offering has to be enhanced, the gaps have to be filled, the proposition has to be unique, the fight against piracy and unauthorised access has to be fought on multiple fronts," he adds.

"We believe Asia has huge advantages in being able to learn from the U.S. experience," Himatsinghani says, adding: "This is a great time to pre-empt some of what could happen by allowing pay-TV to offer it first, to open up an easy way to watch some of the greatest TV of all time, all in one place."

In addition to multi-screen, on-demand and streamed value adds

for a TV everywhere generation, Hits offers a basic-tier linear channel with curated content no one else is offering, and slick, modern branding/design created by Italian group, MU Design, led by Moira Abramzon.

Hits is not "a me-too. It's a me-first," Himatsinghani says, eager to avoid any hint of "retro" or "old". "We are staying very far away from retro or library," he says, emphasising Hits' availability in HD, on multiple screens and platforms, as well as the modern approach to curating and presenting the line up of 'best-of' titles.

Formerly Fox International Channels' SVP and general manager for Southeast Asia, Himatsinghani says Hits fills the regional general entertainment gap created by the current rush to first run and exclu-

sive rights. "A gap has been created for high-rating shows that audiences have always watched, but which aren't necessarily consistent with premium channel strategies," he says, adding that the grid has been designed to tap appointment viewing preferences and binge access.

Among the points Himatsinghani raises as he talks about Asia's content environment going into 2014, is enhanced offerings and access. This is especially important for pay-TV platforms in a world of ultra-fast broadband networks, widespread piracy and the exploding use of virtual private networks (VPNs) to get around online geo-blocking. "If you make it easy for people to access the content they want, across every genre, there's no reason for them to exit the pay-TV ecosystem," Himatsinghani says.

Veteran Asian programming exec, Sandie Lee, is driving Hits' content strategy



Clockwise from top:
The Cosby Show, Seinfeld
and Lost

and acquisitions as Rewind Networks' vice president and channel head. Lee has populated the launch grid's weekday prime time with *Diff'rent Strokes* (stripped at 7pm), followed by *Golden Girls* (7.30pm), *Moonlighting* (8pm), *Criminal Minds* (9pm), *The Cosby Show* (10pm), *Seinfeld* (10.30pm) and *Lost* (11pm). Back-to-back omnibus blocks have been scheduled at weekends.

"We have two sets of audiences – the first timers and people who remember these shows from the past and want to see them for the second time," Lee says.

Hits premieres in Asia on Singapore platform StarHub's basic entertainment package, giving it the same reach as WarnerTV, Lifetime,

AXN, Fox and Diva Universal, among others.

The channel is being offered in both standard definition and HD, and will also be available on StarHub's TV Anywhere service. On-demand service, Hits Replay, will launch in early 2014 on both StarHub's cable and TV Anywhere platforms.

Himatsinghani says about 50% of the schedule at launch will be HD upconverted from standard definition and the rest has been acquired in HD from the studios, which have remastered and upgraded their libraries. "Over time, everything will be in HD," he says.

Prime time in December

Diff'rent Strokes (7pm) Sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes* aired from 1978 to early 1986. A generation of TV viewers grew up with a message, wrapped in entertainment, that "the world don't move to the beat of just one drum... what might be right for you might not be right for some" and brave treatment of issues such as racism, drug use and child abuse in special episodes.

The Golden Girls (7.30pm) Betty White, Bea Arthur, Rue McClanahan and Estelle Getty will forever be remembered for their roles as four older women dealing with everything from men to ethics. The award-winning sitcom ran for seven seasons from 1985 to 1992 on NBC.

Moonlighting (8pm) Starring Cybil Shepherd and Bruce Willis as private detectives, *Moonlighting* aired on ABC from 1985 to 1989. The dramedy was said to be among the most expensive TV produced at the time at about US\$1.8 million per episode.

Criminal Minds (9pm) CBS' police procedural premiered in 2005 and is still running. *Entertainment Weekly* noted that the current season's highest rated episode was the one where Shemar Moore took his shirt off.

The Cosby Show (10pm) Even viewers who weren't born at the time the show ended in 1992 know about this one.

Seinfeld (10.30pm) *Seinfeld*, created by Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld, ran for nine seasons from 1989 to 1998, and is often listed as one of the greatest TV shows of all time.

Lost (11pm) Supernatural drama *Lost* ran for 121 episodes over six seasons to 2010, and is also listed as one of the best TV shows ever.