

REWIND NETWORKS'

AVI HIMATSINGHANI

By Mansha Daswani

When Avi Himatsinghani set out to start his own venture after spending a number of years at FOX International Channels, he knew he didn't want to get into the frenetic business of battling it out for exclusive access to the latest big hit out of the U.S. With Rewind Networks he has taken the road less traveled in Asia's competitive English-language pay-TV entertainment business, rolling out HITS, which is focused on enduring library titles. He tells **TV AsiaPac** about the opportunities he's finding with platforms across the region.

TV ASIAPAC: What gap did you see in the market that led you to launch HITS last year?

HIMATSINGHANI: I'm a really big believer in branded entertainment destinations. They have become more important in a multichannel environment that is constantly getting more fragmented. I love brands that deliver a certain promise to the audience. In Asia over the last four or five years, we saw a whole lot of general-entertainment brands coming in, all doing the same thing: focusing on first-run content, mostly from the U.S. studios. We couldn't play that game. I had seen that great shows, even when repeated on the mainstay networks, rated well. HITS originated there. I believe HITS [fills] a latent need for a great destination where people can watch their favorite shows of all time, or see shows they've heard of but never seen.

TV ASIAPAC: You have carriage in Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. What are your plans for expanding to other markets?

HIMATSINGHANI: We have 13 territories that we've bought rights for in Southeast Asia, including Hong Kong and Taiwan. Our game is to get into every platform in all of these markets. One

of the great things we have going for us is the complete offering—the linear channel along with the catch-up on-demand and authenticated TV Everywhere services.

TV ASIAPAC: What's resonating with your audience?

HIMATSINGHANI: Great wholesome family entertainment with fantastic comedy, like *The Cosby Show*, has struck a real chord with the audience. Even shows like *The A-Team*, *The Golden Girls* and early seasons of *Criminal Minds* and *Grey's Anatomy* are performing very well. Our weekend binge strategy is working phenomenally well. We've stayed committed to our daily strips and weekend stacks. On weekends we do back-to-back [airings] of the five shows stripped during the week. That's working really well.

TV ASIAPAC: You mentioned *Criminal Minds* and *Grey's Anatomy*, which are both still on the air. When it comes to current products, how deep into the lifecycle of these series can you go before you start entering the first-run acquisitions circuit?

HIMATSINGHANI: It's a challenge. We've had conversations with our platform partners and they've said, you need to stay true to your commitment. Yes *Criminal Minds* is still on air, but season one is almost ten years old, so is *Grey's Anatomy*. We don't want to get into the space where the chances of [a show] being seen on other networks are very high. If there's a sizable gap between the [seasons we have and] the current season, then it's worth doing. A lot of people haven't seen seasons one and two of *Criminal Minds*. We won't take a lot of [current product], but we will focus on some of the big shows that still resonate.

TV ASIAPAC: How have your dealings with the studios been in terms of catch-up rights?

HIMATSINGHANI: What we're talking to the studios about is enhancing value. We've made investments into buying rights to older shows, but we want to make sure the shows come with the necessary rights for us to be able to provide a complete offering to audiences. For all of our shows, we have negotiated catch-up on-demand rights. If the shows don't have those rights, we don't buy them. The studios that we've worked with have done a fantastic job at supporting us in our mission to be relevant to all audiences, including the time-starved people who require catch-up.

TV ASIAPAC: What kind of critical mass do you need before you can start selling ad time?

HIMATSINGHANI: We are extremely focused on getting our channel distributed to all of our 13 markets. That being said, our recent ratings in Singapore show that we are hitting critical mass. We want to work with the pay-TV platforms very closely. We are clearly positioned as a basic service, so naturally as we enter affiliate deals with [platforms], we are hitting critical mass in each of these markets. We believe that the best people to represent our ad time are our affiliate partners, because they know their markets best. So we've given up to 6 minutes of airtime per hour to be sold locally by the affiliate partners. But we haven't really focused on that area yet—we are focused on getting distribution. ■

