

VOOM HD

VOOM Networks is taking the high road in Asia, encouraging competitors to collaborate to make the HD channels pie bigger for everyone.

“Broadcast television is still delivering the largest audiences and is the most localised television option for most territories. Once the local broadcasters are transmitting in HD, then the viewer is more likely to spend the money for an HD set that drives interest in tiers of HD channels.”



Byambajav Ulambayar, VOOM Portraits

“You learn to walk by walking,” says Robert Wilson, avant-garde artist and theatre director, celebrated for his use of light and his exploration of movement, a man *The New York Times* called “a towering figure in the world of experimental theatre”... and the creator of *VOOM Portraits*, which are scheduled to come to Asia by 2009.

The exhibitions of Wilson's HD video portraits in Beijing and Singapore are part of VOOM's global tour, celebrating the arts sure, but most importantly showcasing a stunning new medium in a way few sales pitches or road shows ever could.

“The *VOOM Portraits* of celebrities and icons such as Brad Pitt, Selma Hayek, performance artist Zhang Huan and world-class sumo wrestling champion Byambajav Ulambayar demonstrate how a master artist can use the high definition video medium to great effect,” says Greg Moyer, VOOM HD Networks general manager.

VOOM's role at the forefront of the migration to HD clearly involves more than selling

a bouquet of channels, led in Asia by the 15-month-old VOOM HD, or, indeed, selling VOOM channels.

Carriage contracts for HD channels are already in place in 35 countries, including Asia. Additional channels will roll out this year. Details for Asia are still under wraps.

“It is always challenging to be a pioneer,” Moyer says, adding: “Often, we find that part of our role is to help companies sort out the technology of HD as it pertains to set-top converters or how best to groom the signal for transmission. What is “old hat” for transmission of standard definition is a new challenge in HD.”

Moyer, known for encouraging HD programmers to work together to drive the HD business, says one of the best things that could happen is to have more terrestrial broadcasters commit to HD feeds of their channels.

“Broadcast television is still delivering the largest audiences and is the most localised television option for most territories,” he says, adding: “Once the local broadcasters are

transmitting in HD, then the viewer is more likely to spend the money for an HD set that drives interest in tiers of HD channels."

"Only with the full complement of broadcast and specialty channels available does HD become a technology that moves from being the darling of the early adopters to the must-have consumer appliance of the mainstream household," Moyer adds.

For the moment, the HD world belongs primarily to factual programmers. "As it has evolved, some of the major factual brands have been among the first to provide HD feeds in countries around the world," Moyer says, adding that "the real world has never looked as enticing as it does on an HDTV flat screen."

This may in part be because factual channels own rights to their programmes, which makes it easier to move the content across the globe. Discovery HD Theater, National Geographic HD and VOOM HD often launch together on new tiers of HD service now being introduced.

"Ultimately, the impact of any television programme derives from the quality of the story being told. HDTV does a better job of immersing the viewer in the television watching experience, creating a deeper emotional connection to the story being presented," Moyer says.

"While movies and scripted series shot or transferred from film to HD video masters also compel viewership, nothing is as striking to the viewer as the clean, crisp edges of the HDTV picture captured by the HD video camera."

Other genres are emerging, including music. Moyer says the music category "seems to have come back to life in HD".

"We've noticed an HD channel called MelodyZen launching in some European territories. Concert performances with full 5.1 Dolby digital surround sound translate much better in HD than in standard definition. Our own music channel RAVE HD is a treat for the eyes and the ears."

The Beijing Olympics in August is expected to drive take up, as worldwide interest focuses on sports in HD.

"That will be the first time many viewers see live sports in HD. The Beijing Games should be



Zhang Huan, VOOM Portraits

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Greg Moyer
General Manager
VOOM HD Networks

a showcase for HD technology that raises the profile of high-definition television, especially in Asia," Moyer says.

The most difficult part of rolling out HD channels has been – "surprisingly," Moyer adds – getting set-top box manufacturers to meet their promises in provisioning cable and satellite customers with HD-capable units.

"We've seen more delay over the issue of HD set-top converter availability than any other single issue," he says, adding that this is "obviously natural" for an emerging technology.