

New home for Astro's premium original series

Malaysia's platform creates premium destination for growing slate, Viu originals added to line up

Malaysia's Astro has created a new home for its full catalogue of premium originals, rolling out the Astro Premier channel (linear/on-demand) for all domestic customers at no additional charge until the beginning of February 2024.

The service kicks off with Astro original, *Riot!*, which follows four university students exposing the sexual misconducts of a respected professor.

Describing itself as Malaysia's leading digital streaming and content company, Astro says the new service will be a "destination for all premium content locally and regionally".

Astro originals headed for the fledgling premium service include *Gamers Mangkuk*, about five underdog gamers eyeing an opportunity to play with a professional team by winning a competition organised by a famed e-sports athlete; and *Headliners*, about a part-time journalist, Lia, who discovers her late mother's polaroid camera that prints pictures of future tragedies.

The other two new titles are *ID*, which delves into the challenges of falling in love when everything is fake; and *X-Change*, about a son forced to take over his family business – robbing gold stores – after his father's demise.

Astro Premiere has acquired seven titles from regional streamer Viu.

The Viu titles are dark fantasy hit *Nenek Bongkok Tiga*, the Tagalog adaptation of *Flower of Evil*, the Indonesian adaptations of popular titles *Pretty Little Liars* and *Bad Boys vs Crazy Girls*, and *Alter-Naratif*, *Return Man* and *Devoted*.

More on page 2



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From page 1: Astro

Astro's original library titles include *Projek: Anchor SPM*, *Kudeta* and *Histeria*, along with Chinese Astro originals, including *The Patient* and *Lost & Found*, and Indian series, Vinmeen exclusive *Kalvanai Kandu Pidi*.

The new channel launch came on the eve of Astro's latest results announcement today (Monday, 25 September), during which group CEO, Euan Smith, highlighted the take up of TV packs as well as the theatrical performance of *Polis Evo 3*, which at RM54 million/US\$12 million, beat Hollywood blockbusters with an additional RM1.7 million/US\$362,853 to date on the Astro First pay per view service.

"As we pivot to be a digital, streaming company, Astro's TV packs, which can be bundled with our own internet service, Astro Fibre, continue to see good take-up," he said, adding that Astro's originals and fresh content remained a "key differentiator".

Astro's broadband base grew 27% for the quarter to end August for the quarter to end August (Astro's financial year runs to end January).



ABS-CBN extends Kapamilya Online Live on YouTube to Europe, Aus/NZ

Philippines' ABS-CBN's Kapamilya Online Live on YouTube has launched in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the Manila-based programmer said today. The new rollouts follow Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and in other parts of Asia earlier this year.

In addition to long-running noontime show, *It's Showtime*, and news programming, prime-time series available on the YouTube channel include FPJ's *Batang Quiapo*, *The Iron Heart*, and *Senior High*, as well as afternoon dramas *Pira-Pirasong Paraiso* and *Nag-Aapoy Na Damdamin*.

**539 proposals for Taiwan's int'l pitch
53 projects picked for four-day TCCF pitch in November**



Studio76's Dennis Yang at last year's TCCF pitch in Taipei

Award-winning Japanese director Koji Fukada's new film is among the 53 projects selected to participate in this year's Taiwan Creative Content Fest (TCCF) pitch in Taipei in November.

Organised by the Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TAICCA), the pitch is part of the TCCF festival.

A record-breaking 539 entries from 29 countries/regions were received for this year's pitching sessions, which will be held from 7-10 November.

Submissions included international projects for the first time.

The combined prize money, supported by TCCF partners such as France's Series Mania, tops US\$150,000, with additional access to separate funding initiatives.

This year's submissions came from Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Iran, France and the U.S., among others, festival organisers said.

November's pitching event is divided into two – Project to Screen (film and TV proposals) and Story to Screen (Taiwanese IP with adaptability potential).

Each of the Project to Screen winners will receive US\$30,000.

The four sessions in the Project to Screen section are feature films and

series, with animation features/Series and documentary features/series added for the first time.

Film projects that are part of the final pitches include *The Shadows* by Japanese horror producer Takashige Ichise, and a new feature from Taiwanese director, Lingo Hsieh (*The Bride, Green Door*), in his first foray into the English-speaking market.

In the series section, Malaysian director Edmund Yeo presents an adaptation of Yoko Tawada's dystopian novel, *The Last Children of Tokyo*, an international co-production between Betula Films and Flash Forward Entertainment (Taiwan) and NHK (Japan).

Director Teng I-Hang, creator of Taiwanese drama, *Fragrance of the First Flower*, presents her new project, *So May We Start*, a coming of age story set against the backdrop of the Taiwanese indie rock music scene.

Animated projects include French director Denis Do's *Sorya*, which follows a young Cambodian woman seeking freedom in the city.

Documentary projects include *Island of the Winds*, documenting 20 years of history of the Losheng Sanatorium, and Mary Stephen's *Palimpsest: traces of a name*.

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Nippon promises to “protect the value of Studio Ghibli forever” Succession secured, acquisition expected to close on 6 October

“It is difficult to carry Ghibli alone,” Goro Miyazaki, the chosen heir to iconic Japanese animation house, told his father, the 82-year-old legendary animation director and Studio Ghibli co-founder, Hayao Miyazaki. “It is better to leave the future of the company to others,” the younger Miyazaki, himself an animation producer, added in a conversation made public this month.

The father/son disappointment set off a well-documented hunt for a successor to whom Ghibli could “entrust” management. “The issue of successors has been a concern for a long time,” the studio said. Ultimately, the search led to Japan’s top commercial broadcaster, Nippon Television. The two started talking last year.

If Nippon Television had any doubts about welcoming Studio Ghibli into its fold as a full subsidiary, these were subsumed in the honour and the headlines of becoming the guardian of one of Japan’s greatest creative legacies.

Nippon TV committed to continuing “to protect the value of the brand forever” and being a safe custodian of properties such as *Spirited Away* and *My Neighbor Totoro*, along with *How Do You Live? (aka The Boy and the Heron, 2023)*, which took seven years to make.

All of this hasn’t allayed fans’ fears that new management signals the end of Ghibli. Or the dramatic headlines around the world.

The monetary value of the deal, expected to close on 6 October this year, has not been disclosed. Nippon said only that “the impact on future consolidated results will be minor”.



Yoshikuni Sugiyama, representative director/chairman of Nippon TV (left) and Toshio Suzuki, president/representative director of Studio Ghibli

The privately owned Studio Ghibli, established in June 1985, is capitalised at ¥10 million/US\$67,000, according to documents released during the announcement on 21 September.

The deal makes Nippon TV Studio Ghibli’s largest shareholder, with 42.3% of voting rights.


Nippon TV said the acquisition, which protects Studio Ghibli’s autonomy, would allow the studio to concentrate on creation and production and increase output. “We will continue to support Ghibli’s works and create an environment where Ghibli can continue to make movies,” Nippon said.

The acquisition comes almost four de-

acades after Nippon TV aired its first Ghibli title, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) in 1985, and 25 years after investing in the movie, *Bun* (1989). Ghibli titles are regulars on Nippon TV’s broadcast schedule.

In unveiling the acquisition, Nippon listed milestones in the long relationship, including an investment in *Mitaka Forest* (2001) and supporting the establishment of the Ghibli Museum.

“The entire Nippon Television Group is committed to supporting this world-class studio even more than ever before,” Nippon’s Mikuni Sugiyama, representative director, chairman and executive officer, said.





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Taiwan's "white terror" drama starts filming

Hakka TV/Go Inside back Jim Wang's nine-episode premium series



From left: Wu Nien-hsuan, River Huang, Wang Shih-hsien, Hsia Teng-hung, Tsao Yu-ning

In 1950, as the Korean War raged, martial law was imposed in Taiwan and the forces of democracy battled communism, political prisoners from different backgrounds were incarcerated on Taiwan's notorious Green Island.

Black Tide Island, a nine-episode drama directed by Golden Bell award-winner Jim Wang, is based on the medical professionals among them, who, with limited facilities and against all odds, set up a small surgery.

Against the backdrop of what has come to be called Taiwan's era of "white terror", these men went on to save lives, bring hope in desperate circumstances and, despite their differences, forge life-long bonds.

Black Tide Island stars Wu Nien-hsuan as Qiu Yong-gui, a tenacious college graduate from a Hakka village. River Huang is Luo You-de, a knowledgeable but social-phobic and arrogant Hakka

physician, with Tsao Yu-ning as talented but directionless mixed-race Hakka/Hoklo artist, Liu Chaoqin.

Hsia Teng-hung plays Li Mu-xiong, a seemingly brave war doctor with his own trauma, and Wang Shih-hsien is Hoklo Taiwanese physician Zhong Fu-yuan.

Production on the nine-episode period drama, which has been in development since 2018, kicked off in Tainan this month and is scheduled to run until December.

The series, produced by Hakka TV & Roger Cheng for Go Inside, will be distributed internationally, Cheng says.

Created from scratch from a story uncovered by director Wang and Cheng, *Black Tide Island* involves multiple languages and dialects, including Hakka and Japanese.

"We thought it's so unbelievably amazing that how these real prison-

ers managed to bring hope to people while being so desperate and hopeless in prison. They even self-made violins and formed a band while in jail. They have a saying "If you don't kill time, time will kill you!," Cheng says.

"Prisoners were from many different backgrounds," he adds, outlining what turned out to be the production's biggest challenge – languages. Actors speak Hakka, Taiwanese, Japanese and Mandarin (Taiwan was under Japanese rule during 1895-1945).

Tainan was chosen for the shoot because of the government-backed film studio for period drama, which received partial funding from Taiwan's Ministry of Culture.

Hakka TV backed the series as part of its original drama mandate. While some of the characters are of Hakka origin, the show is targeted at a much wider audience, Cheng says.

Justice for survivors still MIA in Johnny & Associates scandal

BBC's Mobeen Azhar seven months after *Predator: The Secret Scandal of J-pop*

On 2 October, the new leadership of disgraced Japanese talent agency, Johnny & Associates, will unveil their vision for the company's future beyond compensation and better guardrails.

Meanwhile, Japanese media outlets, including public broadcaster NHK, are scrambling for a narrative that doesn't lay blame on them for the blind eye they turned on sexual abuse for decades.

At the same time, consumer brands, having bowed to Johnny's bullying for years, are threatening to ditch the agency and its stars.

All this upheaval, including the resignation of president/sole owner, Julie Fujishima, on 6 Sept, had little to do with any sudden epiphany at Johnny & Associates or courage by powerful mainstream domestic media platforms.

Rather, the dramatic downfall has much to do with journalist and filmmaker Mobeen Azhar's BBC documentary, *Predator: The Secret Scandal of J-Pop* (March 2023), followed by opposition politicians who picked up the cause, independent investigations and, finally, local media who found their courage in the crowd.

In addition to various firsts, including persuading survivors of sexual abuse by agency founder Johnny Kitagawa to talk on camera, Azhar's documentary, directed and produced by Megumi Inman, promised to expose "the brutal consequences of turning a blind eye".

Did Azhar, when he started researching the story in 2019 just after abuser extraordinaire Johnny Kitagawa died, think the media's overall failure to cover abuse would be such a strong part of his story?

"I didn't think that there was an entirely joined up reason why the press would have turned their back on this," he told *ContentAsia* shortly after Fujishima's resignation and the opening of media floodgates.

As he explored the story, Azhar and



Left: Journalist Mobeen Azhar, *Predator: The Secret Scandal of J-Pop*; above, *Shukan Bunshun* reporter, Ryutaro Nakamura (right)

Inman realised the extent of Johnny & Associates control not only of his artists, but of Japanese media as a whole.

"If you're being kind you can call it soft pressure. If you're being unkind, you can say they weaponised the control they had," he says.

"What this meant is that the Japanese press, ultimately, was being censored... and being complicit in self-censoring," he says, adding that Johnny's "iron fist" didn't happen overnight. "It was intentionally built up over decades".

Azhar himself felt the force of Johnny's power. The company's communications chief "consistently dismissed the premise of the investigation... just completely refused to engage with the seriousness of what was being asked... about the sexual exploitation of minors, about sexual abuse, about paedophilia, allegations of rape. For a company and someone in a position of responsibility to be so dismissive, I thought was not only

distasteful. It was disgraceful, actually," Azhar says.

It is now a little over six months since *Predator: The Secret Scandal of J-Pop* aired on BBC Two, followed by The United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights study as well as an independent investigation in Japan.

"After the documentary came out, all the chatter was online... The majority of Japan's mainstream press completely ignored the story once again," Azhar says. It was only after more survivors started coming forward and the independent investigation was announced that Japanese media leaped on board.

Open day on Johnny & Associates dawned once Fujishima resigned on the recommendation of the independent investigators.

Azhar describes that as a pivotal moment. "Since then, I think things have really shifted," he says. But it's not enough. "Now the press is reporting the story, but still not really looking at it," he says, adding: there still isn't "the emphasis that I would like to see on justice for survivors... there seems to have been a huge emphasis on what Johnny & Associates will do next."

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Fun, but not nearly there: video producers on AI

Daryl Burney and Richard Juan on their experiments with AI filmmaking

At first glance, *The Safe Zone* could look like every writer, director and producer's – and maybe even actor's – worst nightmare. The six-and-a-half-minute short film, which taps dark fears about artificial intelligence and technology run amok, was created, written and directed by AI. Kind of.

Eight months, 102,000 views and 181 comments later, Philippines/Hong Kong-based producer, Richard Juan, talks about significant human intervention between asking ChatGPT for ideas and concepts and uploading the finished video.

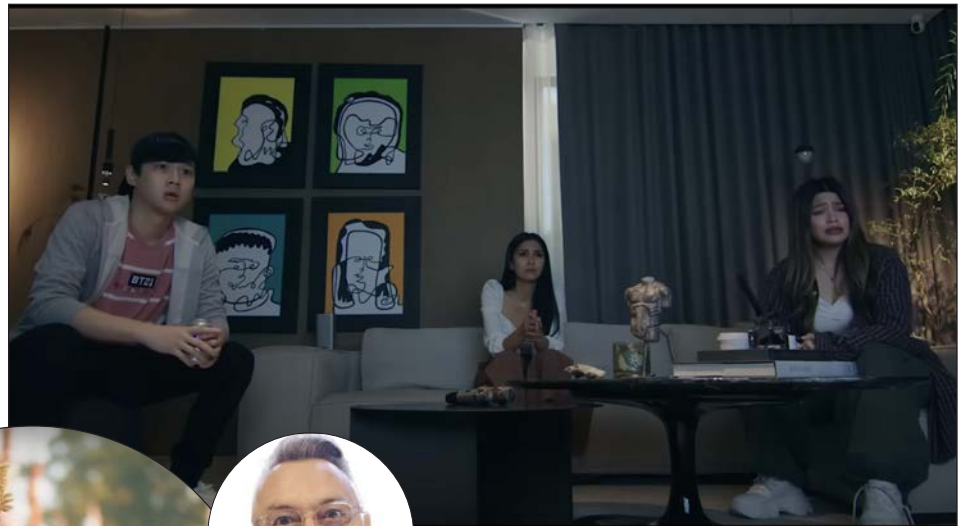
To begin with, Juan asked AI for everything, including camera angles and lenses, a script and wardrobe/ make-up suggestions, fully intending to follow the AI lead. Turns out that he had to adjust a lot more of the AI output than he anticipated.

"We're still in the early days of AI," he acknowledges. "Our biggest struggle was when we were shooting... AI is not able to evaluate acting, to correct as we go," he says, describing the end product more "as a human, AI and technology collaboration".

The story Juan picked off the list that ChatGPT generated in the proverbial blink of an eye is about three friends about to die with the rest of humankind as AI takes over the world. Their only chance is a "safe zone" beyond the reach of AI. But there's only space in the zone for one of them...

The film, produced by 28 Squared Studios in association with Moon Ventures, took seven days from start to finish, including some back and forth re-generating and choosing between a "positive" or "negative" ending.

The shoot was on a real-life set, with lots of participation from friends and colleagues. AI didn't sound any alarms about the audio, so the team eventually had to spend a few hours in a studio



The Safe Zone



Daryl Burney, Founder and Executive Post Producer, EditLounge; (left, AI generated publicity image)

redoing it. Juan highlights the best take-aways. "As a producer, a much faster time frame is appealing," he says, chalking the rest down to a great experience. In Singapore, post house EditLounge came to a similar conclusion after deploying multiple widely available AI services. EditLounge's mission was to see if a marketing department could bypass production costs to make their own 60-second corporate video using only AI for everything from voice over and music to logo and motion graphics, without filming or hiring creative talent. Only editing was done manually. "And the verdict is... no, not really," says Daryl Burney, Editlounge's founder and executive post producer. But the exercise was a valuable one. "We found some great tools that can aid the content creation process," Burney says. These include ChatGPT, which Burney describes as "our go to for the script".

The avatar came from Synthesia, Biteable worked for the explainer graphics, Aiva was the choice for music, MidJourney for stills, Genmo and LeiaPix for manipulating those stills and Gen2 and Kaiber for video content. "Just don't ask it to do people...yet," Burney warns.

The big question: Are creatives out of a job? "Also, no, we just have a ton of great new tools at our disposal," Burney says, pointing out the pace of tech development in the space. "As you read this my opinions are probably already out of date," he says.

"Technology is always going to be there, and it's going to keep improving. It's up to us whether or not we want to adjust to it," Juan says, adding: "People are always going to be reluctant to change, but it's up to us to know how to use technology and use AI to adjust to it and work together and create things better and faster."

What was his biggest learning? "What I learned is you cannot just dump everything" into an AI platform and expect it to complete the entire task flawlessly. "You can't for instance, ask for the whole 90-minute script based on a synopsis. You have to go paragraph by paragraph, maybe even sometimes sentence by sentence to get the best results". At least for now.



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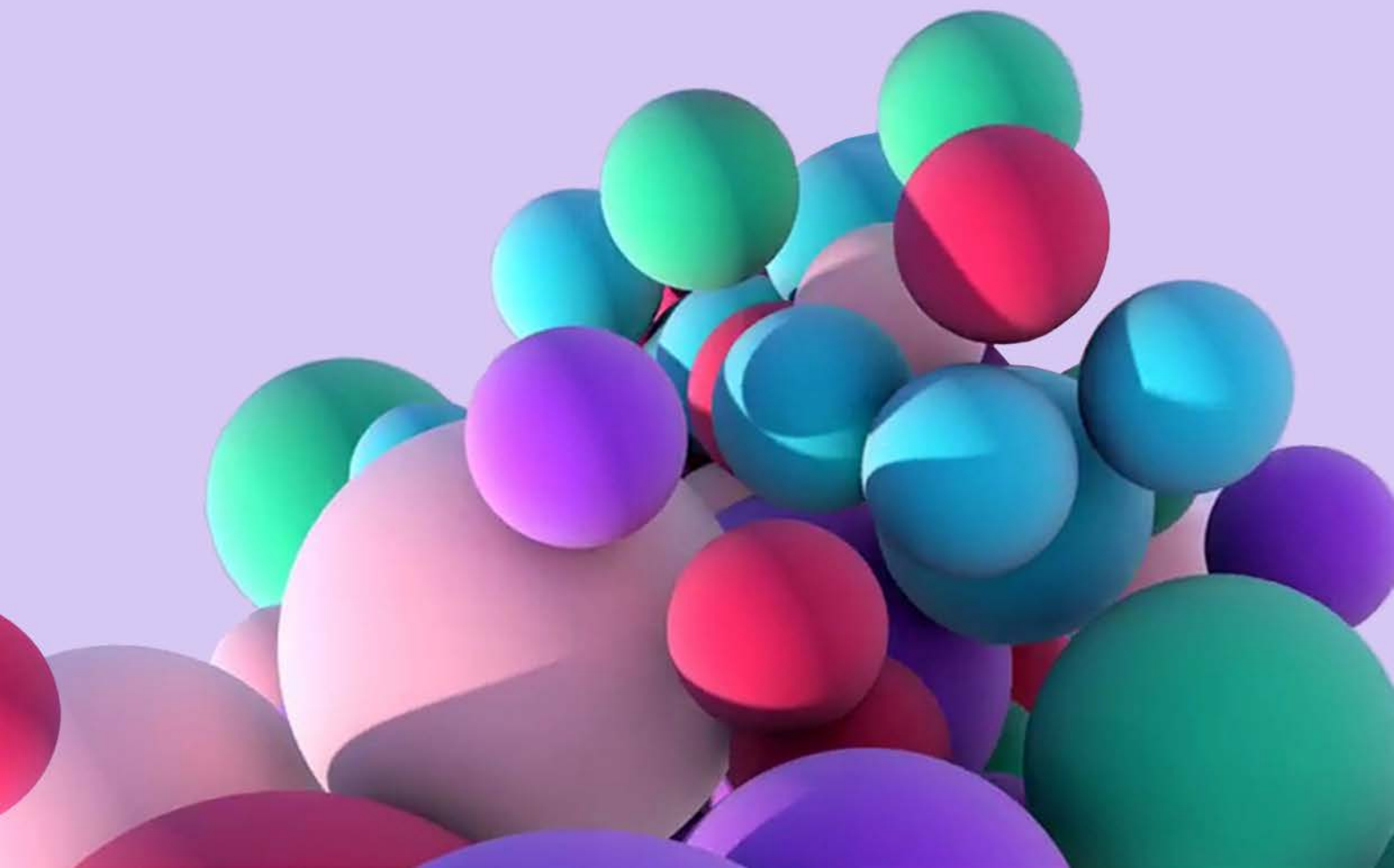
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“We are all in the entertainment channel space but we are not in the ‘I live and you die’ kind of environment. We understand that services and platforms face many challenges. We get that and we support them however we can... the linear space needs diverse and varied content, so we don’t want any channels to go away, because frankly, that means viewers have one less reason to stay on the platform. So we try very hard to see what we can do to improve our channels. We don’t play tug-of-war. In fact, we even recommend shows to one another... we need to make sure that viewers have something to watch any time they turn on the TV, that’s the most important thing.”



Sandie Lee, EVP & Channel Head, Rewind Networks, on the competitive environment for U.S. studio programme rights among channels.



There is enough room for all the current channels to make the general entertainment scene dynamic and appealing to viewers. There's no tug of war between us for rights... I don't need to acquire every show I'm interested in... I believe all content deserves a good spot in the schedule. If I don't have the bandwidth to acquire anything new during that period, I would rather share it with the others [Rewind Networks/Hits or Rock Entertainment]."



Denise Tham, Director, Programming and Acquisition,
KC Global Media Asia



“Every year the U.S. studios produce an abundance of high-quality TV series. There’s a lot of supply in the market to meet our needs. Ultimately, what the three of us [Rock Entertainment, Rewind Networks/Hits, KC Global Media Asia] want to do is to choose the best programme, the best content, for our viewers. Although there might be some overlap sometimes, eventually each channel has its unique personality and DNA that drives our decisions.”



Celine Ong, Director, Program Planning & Strategy,
Rock Entertainment Group

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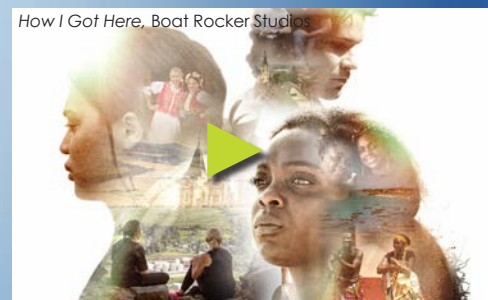
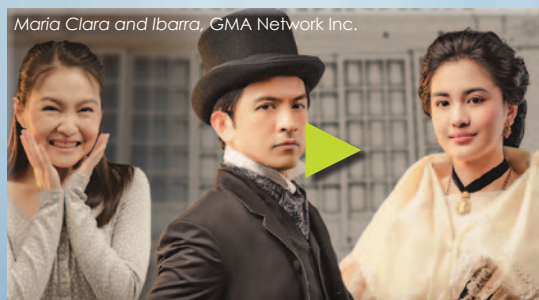
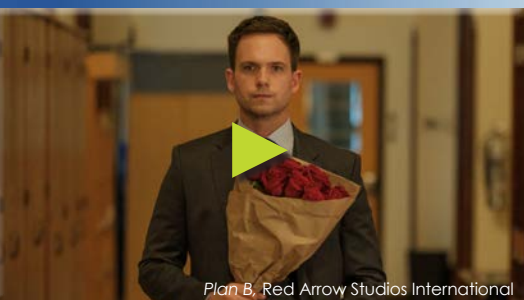
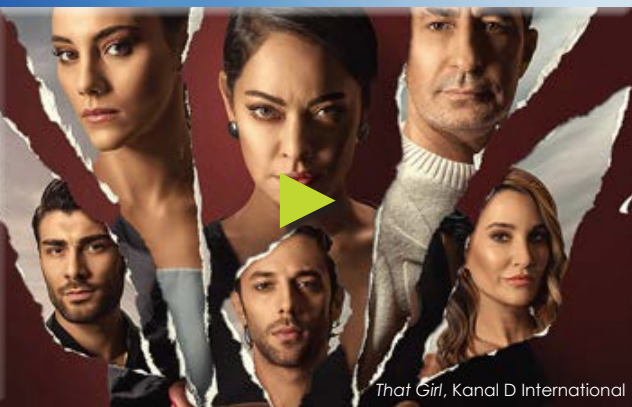
What's on where...

September 2023	26-28	APOS 2023	Bali, Indonesia
October 2023	7-10	Asian Contents & Film Market 2023	Korea
	10	AVIA: Thailand in View 2023	Bangkok, Thailand
	13-15	MipJunior 2023	Cannes, France
	16-19	Mipcom 2023	Cannes, France
	25-27	TIFFCOM 2023	Tokyo, Japan
November 2023	7-12	Taiwan Creative Content Fest 2023	Taipei, Taiwan
	22-23	Dubai International Content Market 2023	Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai
December 2023	5	AVIA: OTT Summit 2023	Singapore
	6	AVIA: Piracy Over the Top 2023	Singapore
	6-8	Asia TV Forum & Market (ATF) 2023	Singapore
	6-8	14th Content Tokyo	Tokyo, Japan
March 2024	3-6	Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC)	Melbourne, Australia
	11-14	Hong Kong International Film & TV Market 2024	Hong Kong
	19-21	Series Mania Forum 2024	Lille, France
April 2024	12-17	Canneseries 2024	Cannes, France
	15-17	Mip TV/Mip Formats/Mip Doc/Mip Drama 2024	Cannes, France
May 2024	29-31	BroadcastAsia/CommunicAsia 2024	Singapore
June 2024	6-8	Telefilm Vietnam 2024	Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
	17-18	DW Global Media Forum 2024	Bonn, Germany
	24-27	Sunny Side of the Doc 2024	France
July 2024	3-5	15th Content Tokyo	Tokyo, Japan
August 2024	20-21	ContentAsia Summit 2024	
	22	ContentAsia Awards 2024	

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Mirzapur 3's Oct premiere drives demand Prime Video hit tops Pakistan titles – Parrot Analytics

Pakistan's audiences are holding fast to Prime Video's Indian action crime thriller *Mirzapur*, and their loyalty to ATV's Turkish epic, *Kurulus: Osman*, remains as steadfast for the week of 12-18 September as it was six months ago, according to the latest tracking from data science company, Parrot Analytics.

Pakistan's attraction to two Indian dramas – *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* and *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* – is also as vibrant as ever.

Both appeared on the overall top 10, albeit with slightly lower demand than the average show in the market as in March this year.

Mirzapur, which topped both online and overall lists for the week, is likely to be benefitting in the run up to next month's season three premiere.

A second Turkish title, *Resurrection: Ertugrul (Dirilis: Ertugrul, 2014)*, made the top 10 overall list, showing Pakistan as a prime market for Turkish drama.

Top 10 overall TV shows: Pakistan

Rank	Title	Difference from Market Average
1	<i>Mirzapur</i>	17.98x
2	<i>Kurulus: Osman</i>	16.22x
3	<i>Game of Thrones</i>	15.91x
4	<i>Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai (ये रिश्ता क्या कहलाता है)</i>	15.66x
5	<i>Cocomelon</i>	15.18x
6	<i>Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah (तारक मेहता का उल्टा चश्मा)</i>	14.33x
7	<i>Masha And The Bear</i>	13.81x
8	<i>Bebefinn</i>	13.39x
9	<i>Ahsoka</i>	13.36x
10	<i>Resurrection: Ertugrul</i>	13.3x

Top 10 digital originals: Pakistan

Rank	Title	Platform	Difference from Market Average
1	<i>Mirzapur</i>	Amazon Prime Video	17.98x
2	<i>Bebefinn</i>	Netflix	13.39x
3	<i>Ahsoka</i>	Disney+	13.36x
4	<i>Money Heist (La Casa De Papel)</i>	Amazon Prime Video	11.74x
5	<i>The Wheel Of Time</i>	Amazon Prime Video	11.61x
6	<i>College Romance</i>	TVFPlay	11.53x
7	<i>Nas Daily</i>	Facebook Watch	11.38x
8	<i>Hum – I'm Because Of Us</i>	ALTBalaji	9.72x
9	<i>Love</i>	Netflix	9.12x
10	<i>The Witcher</i>	Netflix	9.12x

Date range: 12-18 September 2023

The total audience demand being expressed for a title, within a market. Audience demand reflects the desire, engagement and viewership, weighted by importance; so a stream/download is a higher expression of demand than a 'like'/comment. In this dataset we are comparing the demand that exists for each series in this market, against the average TV show. A difference of 1x represents the market average and 10x means a series is ten times more in demand than the average TV show in this market.



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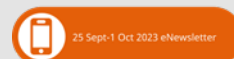
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