



# An Interview With Joshua Sapan: *VOOM*'s Programming Chief

By Jimmy Schaeffler ■ *The Carmel Group*

On behalf of *Broadband Properties*, The Carmel Group's Jimmy Schaeffler conducted an interview during late November 2003, with 16-year Rainbow Media Holdings, LLC veteran, Joshua Sapan. Sapan is the president & chief executive officer of Rainbow Media, the Cablevision subsidiary, which is responsible for planning and developing the 21 exclusive HDTV channels, that now comprise the core of the new Rainbow DBS HDTV-centric satellite-delivered service, called *Voom*. *Voom* launched in mid-October of 2003. It offers con-

## your duties at Cablevision?

I've been with Rainbow Media for 16 years. I've been working on the *Voom* channels since their inception, earlier in the year. I'm president and CEO of Rainbow Media, so I supervise or oversee all of our activities related to content on behalf of Cablevision. That includes national program services AMC, IFC, WE: Women's Entertainment and Fuse; regional sports services; the sports businesses outside of New York, which we own in conjunction with Fox; our regional News12 networks in New York; our Metro TV

to art galleries and museums, call *Gallery*. It's all original native HD, a channel we have devoted to motion video and a new art form we call *MOOV*, M-O-O-V; and *Animania* is an animation channel for kids, it's somewhere in between. So, I think from an original content point of view, I'm pleased with initial introduction of the *Voom* 21.

## Q: What will make *Voom* programming a success?

Great question. The *Voom* 21, I think, will need to be distinctive, they will need to capture the attention and, if you will, the imagination of people. And I think they will need to marry content opportunity with the specifics that HD allows. If what they see on *Voom* is different than what they see on the other channels that are doing HD, and if it sparks their interest and engages them, then I think we met with success.

## Q: Getting *Voom* up and launched, what was the greatest challenge?

I think that the greatest challenge was first taking channels that were in the concept stage and rushing over the mountain and bringing them to reality. So, it's one thing to say we'll have a channel like *MOOV*, or like *Treasure*, which is devoted to collectables—people say that's an interesting notion—or *Rave*, which is the HD music channel, and it's fine to conceptualize that, but going out and shooting the concerts, shooting the videos, working with the record companies to get it done, and being in a pretty intensive production mode was simply a lot to accomplish.

## Q: What sort of challenges does *Voom*

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sumers local digital and HDTV channels via terrestrial antennas, and has plans to have 39 HDTV channels (several times more than any other U.S. service), as well as some 70-80 standard definition TV channels in place by February 2004. Nonetheless, *Voom* faces a daunting challenge of mastering the competition, a doubtful Wall Street community, and a series of technical and infrastructure concerns ahead, that will keep executives like Sapan and *Voom*'s COO, Mickey Alpert, up very late at night, as they build the future of HDTV America for 107 million US TV Households (25 million of which are Multiple Dwelling Units).

**Q: How long have you worked for Rainbow Media? What about *Voom*? And can you tell us briefly about**

channel; and the *Voom* channels that we are making ourselves—the 21.

## Q: How is *Voom* doing as we enter the final month of the 4th quarter of 2003?

You know, I think from a content point of view, we are very pleased with what is a fairly significant undertaking: The launch of 21 channels, all in HDTV, all new. That was, as you might imagine, pretty breathtaking to do in a fairly short period of time. Some of them are substantially dependent upon material we acquired, such as our *HD Cinema 10*, our *Monsters channel*, or our *Epics channel*, which is devoted to movies that are dramatic and epic in their portrayal. Others are very sensitive and focused on original production, like the channel we have devoted

### face now that it's launched?

You know, I think that our challenges will be presenting the *Voom* 21 channels in a way in which they are independent or each individually captivating. For example, the *Rush* HD channel needs to be really appealing to people who like extreme sports. And that's true for all of them. And then we would really like the *Voom* 21 to be seen uniquely as a package of 21. I don't think that's ever been done in TV before. I think historically channels have always been seen as channels in isolation. And our notion is to ask the viewer to weave through the 21, to graze through the 21. We're going to be the first package of channels that actually invites people to not watch what they're watching and to watch something else on *Voom* 21. So we may say you're watching *Treasure*, but right now there's something very important happening on *NewsBytes*, our HD news-oriented service, so why don't you stop watch-

ing this one and watch that for a while? That's a pretty unusual notion.

### Q: Is *Voom* matched to a particular demographic of potential viewers?

You know, that's a great question. It is really designed to appeal in part to every member of the entire household. That said, there's a lean toward an upper income bracket, because they're the one's who can afford HDTVs.

### Q: What's the tipping point for consumers to get on to the HDTV train?

It's pretty simple; keep trying to bring hardware pricing down to a good level and keep delivering more and more great content.

### Q: Does cable or satellite hold the best advantage for deploying HDTV in the next three years? Why?

Essentially, the pie grows, just like it has many times before with similar new products. Both satellite and cable have advantages each will take advantage of.

### Q: What's ahead for *Voom* and for HDTV?

*Voom* has 39 channels of great HDTV ahead and dozens more standard definition channels to deliver by February of next year, and HDTV is off and running. It will become the new standard in just a handful of years, I have no doubt. ■

### About the Author

*Jimmy Schaeffler* researches, analyzes and writes this monthly report for *Broadband Properties*. He is a subscription TV analyst at *The Carmel Group*, a publisher of multichannel industry databooks and the monthly newsletters, such as *DBS Investor* and *Satellite Radio Investor*, and a consultancy based in Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA ([www.carmelgroup.com](http://www.carmelgroup.com)). The company specializes in telecommunications (e.g., cable, satellite and wireless), as well as computers and the media. He can be reached at e-mail [jimmy@carmelgroup.com](mailto:jimmy@carmelgroup.com) or at telephone number 831/643 2222.

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