

Where to Find Foreign-Language Programming

Ethnic niche channels may help expand your market – and attract mass viewers, too

By Michael A. Kashmer ■ *Broadband Properties*

Choosing the right mix of programming for your system or property is tough, as you know. Incumbent cable ops don't tailor their lineup to suit individual towns, neighborhoods or buildings. Consequently they leave many consumers in the dark. These potential subscribers must find alternative entertainment sources. Each month we will be taking a look at programming networks available on cable, IPTV or VOD. We'll supply contact information so you can easily gather additional information if you need to.

Have ethnic consumers in your system or property? Need an addition to your lineup that the competition, both franchise cable and satellite, probably doesn't have? Want to attract and hold on to valuable upscale triple-play broadband customers? An ethnic niche service may be the answer.

This month we will look at foreign language programming and how it can be used to drive growth. Spanish language programming, a huge genre all by itself, will be discussed in a future issue. This time around we will focus on other ethnic program providers.

Asian Media

Mainstream media has historically underrepresented minorities, but many ethnic groups have made great strides in the last quarter-century. There are a number of African-American and Hispanic networks available on cable now, although this was not always the case. In spite of this progress there has not been a national network for Asian Americans until recently. Although Asians increasingly are featured in mainstream ads, the depiction is usually one-dimensional. The value of a pan-Asian network has never been more compelling than now.

Nearly 13 million Asians live in the US, with California having the largest Asian market. Asians, taken as a whole, are

the fastest growing racial group according to the US Census. Asian households are more likely than any other group to be in the \$75K plus annual income range, making them attractive customer prospects. They clearly have extra money to spend on household entertainment, too.

Asians on average have the highest level of educational attainment; 44 percent have a BA or higher. Asians also have one of the highest rates of entrepreneurial activity – 11 percent of all businesses in California and 8 percent of all businesses in New York are Asian-owned.

Most Asians were born overseas and identify with programming from their native countries. Another important factor to entice triple-play consumers to your broadband offering is that Asians have higher household computer and Internet access than any other large ethnic group – 65 percent vs. 56 percent in the white non-Hispanic population. Those who expect to make many overseas calls are an especially good market for digital telephony (VoIP) as well.

As of Census 2000, and for the first time in history, Chinese is now the second most prevalent foreign language spoken in US households after Spanish.

The term “Asian American” describes a highly diverse community. Japanese, Filipinos, Vietnamese and dozens of others are all part of this rich fabric. The networks discussed here address their entertainment

needs and deliver the best Asian programs produced here and abroad.

More than 150 Channels

Successful niche networks must have strong management teams and access to capital. One group that has capitalized successfully on its providers' resources in that regard is Comcast's AZN TV (formerly International Channel). It has focused on existing international channels, which can be imported “as is” to US audiences. These networks tend to be some of the larger brands in their countries of origin. These are well branded networks that have more than enough programming to fill a 24/7 schedule.

AZN TV has been a leading provider of foreign language and multi-ethnic programming since 1990. It delivers programming through one ad-supported channel (AZN TV) and has recently re-launched this linear channel to cater to Asian languages only. It also provides 16 premium channels that offer specific in-language programming from international sources: ART (Arabic), CCTV4 (Chinese), Channel One Russia (Russian), CTI Zong Tian (Chinese), MBC (Korean), NITV (Farsi), Rang-A-Rang (Farsi) RAI (Italian), RTN (Russian), SBTN (Vietnamese), TFC (Filipino/Tagalog), TV Asia (South Asian), TVJapan (Japanese), TVK24 (Korean), TV5 (French) and TV Polonia (Polish).

Another provider, ImaginAsianTV, offers programs in the six most popular Asian languages – Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, South Asian and Vietnamese. These six groups represent 87.5 percent of the Asian population in this country. iaTV offers a 24/7 schedule of films, drama series, music videos, sports, news and original programming. It was the first national television network to promote and serve the Asian American community.

English-speaking hosts introduce and provide commentary about the programs being shown. Programs are scheduled by genre rather than on a country-by-country basis. All in-language programs are subtitled in English to encourage cross-cultural viewing among Asian sub-groups as well as by the mainstream general audience.

Indeed, interest in ImaginAsianTV is not limited to Asian-Americans! Asian programming formats like anime (animation) broke through viewing barriers some time ago in the US. Some of the highest rated programs on G4, MTV, SpikeTV, Cartoon Network and Fox Kids are Asian imports. The Iron Chef program on The Food Network is enormously successful. Also, witness the success of The Anime Network, a SVOD (subscription video on demand) network that is available linear as well. It tapped into the science fiction and martial arts animation segment of the 18-34 male market and has taken off.

ImaginAsianTV is aimed at second- and third-generation Asian Americans and seeks to thrive as cross-cultural view-

ing evolves among Asian groups.

GlobeCast World TV, the satellite subsidiary of France Telecom, has generated a lot of buzz with World TV programming delivered via its satellite platform serving North America. GlobeCast offers 130 TV and radio channels in more than 30 languages representing 40 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. About half of the lineup is free-to-air (FTA) to viewers who have receivers from the company, while the rest of the programming is encrypted. European languages include everything from Armenian, Serbian and Italian to African nets like M2 Maroc and French/Arabic TV. There are also a number of top rated Middle Eastern channels from Jordan, Kuwait and Turkey plus dozens of others including two Israeli Radio nets. Asian/South Asian fare includes Korean, Hindi, Punjabi, Filipino, Cambodian and Thai networks.

Another GlobeCast network, Bridges TV, looks at the Muslim culture in this country with in-depth programs aimed at this growing segment of our population. It

is produced in the US by and for American Muslims.

The Bottom Line

Offering ethnic programming can be a great way to compete with traditional franchise cable systems. You can offer a special, highly targeted service to your customer base when your competition can't.

Marketing is key and these new networks are poised to help out. For example, ImaginAsianTV promotes the systems it serves on ImaginAsianRadio nationwide and The ImaginAsian Theater in New York City offers a highly targeted and effective way of reaching Asian consumers in that area. The Anime Network relies on its home-video and magazine publishing businesses to promote the service. ♦

About The Author

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