

Explore, the new kid on the block

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THE latest addition to the Indian television industry is a Hindi travel channel called the 'Explore'. The channel is launched by an independent new broadcast company called the Explore Broadcasting Private Limited. The test signal was commenced in November 2010. It is currently available on the cable and satellite platform and analog in targeted markets of Delhi and Mumbai and smaller towns. The promoters aim to reach to 5-8 million homes in all the metros and major cities by January 31.

"The team behind Explore is a group of four individuals who have worked in television for the past 15-17 years each. Some of us started our careers with the advent of foreign satellite channels in India. While others joined as professionals from other industries. Each one of us has worked in various functional and line capacities in middle level to senior level positions for various TV channels both in the GEC and niche space. Over this time, we have been friends, colleagues and today have cemented this bond as promoters of Explore Broadcasting," says Rajeev Chaurasia, director, Explore Broadcasting.

However, considering the growing competition and clutter in the Indian broadcast space, what triggered these entrepreneurs to foray into it. Explains Chaurasia, "GEC viewership space is today undoubtedly congested. Research indicates

there are new new opportunities in specialised channels with mass appeal. Evidently, more than one television homes, has resulted in a big demand for infotainment and lifestyle genres. Travel is the largest e-commerce category in India. Estimated 48 million people with valid passports in India - looking to consume travel for business, leisure and sightseeing. Research also indicates that travel will soon become a powerful theme for media business outside of cricket and Bollywood in India."

Industry sources estimate that a travel channel of this scale and size would require an investment of over Rs 60-70 crore. Adex India, which is a division of TAM Media Research, reveals that there was a 55% rise in 'Travel & Tourism' sector advertising on television during the first half 2010 compared to that of 2009. Private or international tourism accounted for nearly 60% of travel and tourism sector advertising on TV during first half of 2010. 'Ministry of Tourism' contributed for 1/4th of travel and tourism sector advertising on TV during first half 2010. However the majority of the travel and tourism advertising was attracted by national channels of various genres. Says a senior media planner, "While there is clear growth in the travel and tourism advertising and there are companies looking for good inventories. However, most of the lifestyle or travel channels in India are backed by large broad-

cast networks. For Explore it will be a big challenge to get advertisers on-board. The channel needs to exhibit a strong programming line up which then needs to be then backed by a strong viewership." He also said, "Looking at the scope and opportunity in the sector and if Explore can deliver good content then the channel may break even in the next 3-4 years."

The travel genre on the Indian broadcast space is dominated by international channels like the TLC (Discovery Travel and Living) or Indian born NDTV Good Times. But Chaurasia says that Explore is different and 'one of a kind'. "TLC is a lifestyle channel. Good Times is a potpourri with travel thrown in and needs to consolidate its brand identity and market positioning. These are the only two that exist in the travel space. However, Explore is the first Indian TV channel dedicated to travel and tourism in the Hindi language with 100% relevance for Indian audiences that aspire to travel and are curious of the world around them and can put the information provided in the programming to good use while travelling. Kids and mothers will find immense value in the geography and

history of places explained in easy and interesting storylines," says Chaurasia.

But what is the scope for a travel channel in Hindi? Chaurasia says, "We are in India and Hindi is our national language. Addressing large audiences makes business sense and impacting them with a new type of programming is a creative challenge. We realised that good quality and specialised channels are generally not in Hindi. It is perceived that such channels are in the realm of a selected few and therefore considered 'niche'. We would like to change the rules of the game. Explore's TG is the educated, not necessarily in academic degrees but evolved in mind with a curious mind. It is of appeal to anyone from the age of 8 to 80." Explore currently has 24-hour of original programming. 80% of the programming is created in-house and the promoters do not plan to get commissioned shows. Throughout the day there are short format shows called the 'Postcard' with 5-6 minute duration.

During prime time the channel has got half an hour shows. But setting up Explore won't be an easy task and there are many challenges. "Since Explore is new, the format and content will take some to settle. But we have received tremendous support from Tourism Boards from across the world. Single channels are difficult to sustain so we are already working towards a strategic alliance with an existing bouquet and at the same time working on additional channels from our own stable. The costs of programming can be high for this kind of content, so we have to always find innovative and smart ways of getting this right. Being available and seen is the key for the success of our channel. So distribution will be the key," says Chaurasia.



(Left to right)
Anil Garg,
Vinod Berry,
Rajeev Chaurasia