

Media companies need to invest in African content



By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Fox Networks recently appointed Evert van der Veer as general manager and vice president of Fox Networks Group Africa, to drive local content production in Africa, as well as accelerate the expansion of Fox Sports on the continent. Van der Veer joins FNG from iFlix where he was responsible for content operations. Prior to that, he was with Viacom, including as VP for Comedy Central and part of the strategy to launch BET in 2015.



Evert van der Veer, general manager and vice president of Fox Networks Group Africa.

Van der Veer spoke to Bizcommunity.Africa about his new role and the opportunities on the continent, as well as the importance of media companies investing back into Africa and having Africans tell African stories with Africans.

■ Can you tell us about your new role?

My focus is on the accelerated expansion of Fox Sports and local content production, linear/non-linear branded entertainment and National Geographic partners across key markets in East, West and Southern Africa. I will be based in the Johannesburg office, but expect to travel extensively as growing our business means a full immersion into the communities in which we operate.

■ What are your strategic business objectives?

I am delighted to be joining off the back of the Fox Sports IP we have created through the WAFU partnership - our inaugural tournament in Ghana in 2017 was a great success and we are getting ready to announce the host countries for upcoming tournaments. Africa Boxing, created in 2017 and in partnership with the WBA, has crowned 12 Pan African champions to date; is another growing entity and we are getting ready to announce partnerships with major commercial partners.

■ What is your marketing strategy for FNG Africa across the continent?

As Fox Networks Group Europe and Africa, we reach 1.8 billion people every day in more than 50 local languages. We deliver standout creative output on our core brands being Fox, National Geographic and Fox Sports and we drive innovation for customers across multiple platforms. Moreover, because we have regional focus we are able to leverage our strength and marketing muscle on digital and social platforms. If you look at a brand like National Geographic, which has 423 million followers on social media, including:

- Facebook: 193.1MM
- Twitter: 41.4MM
- Instagram: 134.2MM (this is the total across all NG Instagram accounts)
- YouTube: 10.5MM
- Google: 22.4MM
- Weibo: 12.7MM

It shows you how adaptive and agile we are, for a brand like National Geographic to be the number one non-celebrity brand on Instagram – tells an inspiring story of the power of social media to elevate brands to the next level. We also work with our affiliates in the different countries in Africa in the promotion of our content and brands (as we are platform agnostic) and that helps with our reach.

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■ When are we going to see investment in local content on the continent?

As a group, Fox Networks Group made a commitment to source, develop and produce original content. Our first regional scripted commission, *Deep State*, premiered (to great success) in various markets and is being sold by Fox Networks Group content division to a number of markets around the world.

In 2016, FNG Africa launched a production business to originate and produce content out of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). One of its main objectives is to tell local stories that connect with African hearts and minds.

FNG Original Productions operates as a quasi-independent production house with clients across media and which will include pay, free, SVOD. In March of 2018 we launched our first ever FNG A local production, *Spirit*, featuring psychic medium Cindy Kruger. We have more productions in the pipeline, which we will announce in due course.

Where will growth in content on the African continent come from in the future?

It can only come from robust research, immersion and a deep dive into understanding audiences that are so vastly different, which is an exciting challenge in itself. Figuring out and tailor making plans for the various segments of the African continent is also a major challenge as understanding consumer patterns and behaviours can only lead to content that resonates. African based media companies need to invest back into the African media landscape and have local people tell local stories, in order to survive and ensure growth on the continent.



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What are you doing to meet the needs of the mobile-first generation?

In FNG E&A, we invest in must have content and innovate in ways to make this content accessible. Last spring, we launched our first VOD service, FOX+, as our first step to bring our highly valued and premium entertainment content to more consumers, creating a compelling customer experience, which is simple and great. In November (2017), we announced our second non-linear product, National Geographic+, building on the leading visual storytelling and journalism National Geographic is known for. FNG E&A is invested in creating as much consumer choice as possible. FOX+ and National Geographic+ combine our expertise in excellent television production with our rich history of product innovation, while fully supporting the Pay-tv industry. In South Africa, both our VOD services are available on Black so far.

Are you engaging at all with the telecommunications companies on the subject of data costs?

Whilst consumers are at the heart of our non-linear services, our core focus and expertise is on operating channels. FNG Europe and Africa operates 154 channels as well as numerous digital services, from 25 offices, broadcasting in 58 countries. Through genre, defining channel brands Fox, Fox Sports and National Geographic; over 250 million viewers in 150 million households watch FNG Europe and Africa.

How do you see growth on the continent?

If I can draw on a few statistics:

- Africa's population is set to double by 2050, and as many as 18 million extra jobs a year will be created (London Stock Exchange Group, 2017).
- There are more than 1 billion people currently on the continent, 81% of this population is in Sub-Saharan Africa (KPMG, 2016).
- Urbanisation rates are set to increase to 57% by 2050 and unemployment levels have stabilised at 7.5%, therefore more consumers have higher levels of available income to spend (International Labour Organisation, 2013).

This shows that job creation and the economic infrastructures of Sub-Saharan African countries, specifically those falling in the SADC region are improving; and that there is fantastic potential for growth which can only enrich both Pay TV and Telecommunications.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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