

MUNDOFOX ENTERS FRAY FOR SLICE OF LATINO TV MARKET



MUNDOFOX

MundoFox is breaching the long held monopoly over airing of channels for the millions of Latinos in the US, who watch Spanish language programming. On Monday the network, is ready to, get, set and go as it gets its official nod to commence operations in 50 cities in the United States, including Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami and New York. MundoFox, a Spanish-language network is a partnership between Fox International Channels owned by the News Corporation and RCN Television in Colombia, said that they were just getting a foothold in this huge market and would slowly but surely carve a special niche for themselves. The venture, it is estimated, is going to cost \$50 million dollars. Speaking in Spanish, Jorge Mettey, MundoFox's senior vice president for news said "We aren't anyone yet, even though we have an exceptional product. Trust and credibility are gained little by little. They are gained through actions." The network hopes to add another ten cities, to the 50 it is airing to in its debut, by the end of this year. Its executives say that they expect to reach almost 80 percent of the Latino viewership in America. This also marks the debut of RCN of becoming part of a broadcast network in the United States. Emiliano Saccone, president of MundoFox said that the Latinos were a force to reckon with in the United States and have the financial and political strength to propel themselves forward. Talking about his networks philosophy, he clarified, "Right now we are as American as anyone else, and we have the political and financial power to essentially step up. It's no longer about defending ourselves from perceptions or beliefs as much as it is about looking forward." The network's tagline reflects this philosophy in unequivocal terms – it reads, "Americano Como Tú," or "American Like You." Accepting that success would not come easy and that the network was likely to face fierce competition, he accepted, "I know it's a long runway." To ensure that MundoFox attracts a distinct viewership, it's executives say that they will create programs that are unlike the lineups of telenovelas, sports and reality programming that Univision and Telemundo lay stress upon. On the contrary, they say they will construct American-style programming in Spanish, adding in more action, making them funnier and turning on-location shoots into scripted shows. It's not that they would completely move away from the long-established telenovela format. Mr. Saccone said, that it would be a misconception to believe so, but that is not going to be a staple at MundoFox, he acknowledged. Hernan Lopez, president and chief executive of Fox International Channels, felt that MundoFox was inspired by the success of the English-language Fox Broadcasting network, which like them, had to face strong competition from the likes of ABC, CBS and NBC, when it made its debut. "Just like it happened for Fox 25 years ago, we believe there was a large part of the audience that was underserved and wanted to see new and innovative ideas on television," Mr. Lopez said. "The exact same thing is happening in Spanish-language television today." The major portion of the network's shows will be produced by RCN in their Colombia studios. The rest will be contributed by 24-hour news channel NTN24 and Fox Deportes. The former is owned by RCN, whilst the latter is Fox's Spanish-language sports network. Shows will also be taken from other allied sources. Mr. Mettey said that there would be at least two news broadcasts but said that their news program would not be inclined towards a conventional and traditionalist mindset. On the contrary, we would always be keeping Latino interest and welfare in mind. The network will not be swayed by others opinions and we will decide for ourselves what is best for us, he added. "Our editorial line is decided by us and reflects the interests of the Latino community in the United States," Mr. Mettey however, said, that the coverage would be "balanced and professional." Mr. Mettey is known for his unorthodox stances and in 2007 was fired from his job as news director at Univision, who accused him of prejudiced coverage. He retaliated by suing the company, forcing Univision to settle out of court for an undisclosed sum. He had counter alleged that the network had allowed its advertisers to influence its news coverage. Moreover, with the Latinos being in the thick of news, owing to the Dreams Act and the Presidential elections looming, Mr. Mettey said that the network had "a moral obligation and a social obligation to encourage civic participation" among its viewers by urging them to vote. Federico Subervi, director of the Center for the Study of Latino Media and Markets at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Texas State University-San Marcos, was skeptical that the channel could have a political and partisan motive and that its very cause for being would be to confront the negative portrayal of Latinos on English language shows. Todd Juenger, an analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein said that the new venture would be a tough act to execute but it could become a virtual goldmine for the company. They are "sitting on a gigantic pile of cash" that it must invest, he said. "Hispanic media is red hot," he concluded. MundoFox will also have to ensure enough viewership and popularity to attract advertisers. So far, according to reports, it has signed contracts with L'Oréal, T-Mobile and Toyota. Jorge Mettey, senior vice president of news for MundoFox said, "I strongly believe there is going to be a lot of demand for what we are going to offer to the community." "Personally, I am so excited with this opportunity and this project. It's very rare to have the privilege of building up a TV network from scratch," he said.