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ntv7 here for the long haul

Melanie Proctor

IT was a brave move that saw terrestrial television station ntv7 going ahead with plans to enter the TV arena earlier this year in spite of the declining economic situation.

As its chairman Datuk Effendi Norwawi said at its launch, "Though coming at a time of a downturn is unfortunate, we are here for the long haul and not for two or three years only. We hope to recover our investment in four to six years."

Tagged as the "feel-good" channel, ntv7 was awarded a broadcasting licence on Aug 1, 1996. It began test transmission on March 7 and official transmission took off a month later. On July 7, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad officially launched the station's Broadcast Centre in Shah Alam. (The Kuching centre started full operations in February).

It had the honour of being the first private TV station to go nationwide on launch day with 80 per cent coverage - in the peninsula (except Kelantan and Terengganu), and Sabah and Sarawak. The station targets the 17-40 age bracket and began with fielding more foreign programmes (such as Brooke Shields' Suddenly Susan, Michael J. Fox `s Spin City, the popular Late Night With David Letterman but was asked to fine-tune the programming to have a better balance between local and foreign shows. The station complied by providing viewers with such local fare as Kopitiam, Abang We, Generasi 3 and Mak Mertuaku. And last month, daily talk show Dateline Malaysia - which features Bahasa and English versions - joined the ntv7 stable.

It is probably, the only free-to-air network that hasn't had to decrease viewing hours during the year. It began with daily programmes from 6pm to 1am but now has programmes from 5pm to a little past midnight. And in fact, the network has increased transmission (9am-5pm) to air video clips and the like during its Beli Belah Karnival slot.

Mega TV

Although Mega TV introduced a new channel late this year (unofficially though), the pay-TV station has been affected by the economic scenario. It was not helped by its debt-collection service which had big problems earlier in the year.

The three-year-old Mega TV, which carries CNN, Discovery, HBO, ESPN and the Cartoon & Variety networks, will hopefully launch its latest channel, the Mega Tian Di Chinese network, in January (it was to have done so in November or December). Tian Di's test transmission began on Nov 7 and is available only in the Klang Valley.

Of course, the shocker for subscribers came when ESPN was quietly taken off the air on Nov 20.

Two weeks later, viewers sighed with relief when the station resumed the ESPN broadcast.

It was at the same time that the station introduced the Mega Mix channel, which featured a compilation of vernacular movies and serials to fill the gap. However, it was moved to another new channel position after Dec 13 until the station's eighth channel is introduced next year.

Meanwhile, due to smaller subscriber bases in Batu Pahat, Lumut, Langkawi, Kluang, Segamat and Kemaman, Mega TV will suspend transmission in these areas effective Dec 31.

(END)