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Plum TV preps for far-reaching expansion

High-end cabler to enter print, mobile, digital in new markets

By TOM LOWRY

Plum TV, a collection of niche cable channels catering to wealthy viewers in high-end resort cities, is planning the biggest expansion in its eight-year history, adding channels in new communities, mobile and other digital offerings and launching print publications.



Scott

Plum was launched by Nantucket Nectars co-founder Tom Scott who, with partners, used the proceeds from the sale of the beverage company to Cadbury Schweppes in 2002 to get the channels up and running.

Scott has recruited Jerry Powers, a co-founder of Ocean Drive magazine in Miami and a music industry vet, to serve alongside him as co-chairman of Plum to oversee the expansion. Nicholas Lehman, an MTV alum poached to Plum several months ago from Barry Diller's IAC, will be the CEO.

"Plum TV has always been known for our unique and high-end audience in niche markets," Scott said. "We're now moving to reach these same consumers in all aspects of their lives." Plum is available to about 80% of the homes in its eight markets.

It is not clear how much is being spent on the expansion, but the company said the board of directors would independently finance the strategy. Board members include Brian Bedol, who helped create what became ESPN Classic and the College Sports Television network that sold respectively to ESPN and CBS; Jonathan and David Kraft of the family that owns the New England Patriots; and independent film producer Cary Woods. Plum's initial investors included former Viacom CEO Tom Freston; former AOL Time Warner exec Bob Pittman, Patriots owner Robert Kraft and singer Jimmy Buffett.

Plum provides programming focusing on everything from food, fashion, the arts to philanthropy on local channels in Aspen, Vail, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, the Hamptons, Telluride, Sun Valley and Miami Beach, catering to wealthy visitors and residents. It is not clear what fresh markets Plum's execs are targeting.

What's more, Plum will be putting on more events, kicking off with a New Year's Eve broadcast from a South Beach hotel that will be shown across all of the Plum channels nationwide.

Plum's strategy is interesting not only because it is expanding at a time when many media companies are contracting, but it is launching print publications at a time when that business is believed to be fraught with risk. Glossies will be launched first in Miami, the Hamptons and Aspen. Going into print makes sense, said Scott, because most of Plum's existing advertisers, luxury brands, are very comfortable with print and spend most of their budgets there. Secondly, he added, "You go into a hotel room in any of these markets and there is a magazine sitting there. You always pick it up to find out what's going on."

When Scott is not working on Plum TV, he is partners with filmmakers Van and Casey Neistat, who have made more than 100 films, often shorts for the Internet, and whose autobiographical show "The Neistat Brothers" bowed on HBO this year.

Contact the variety newsroom at news@variety.com

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