

Big, brave, and bold eNews channel

 By [Chris Moerdyk: @chrismoerdyk](#)

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I have to admire the audacity and passion of the people at e.tv. At first glance, plans to take its 24-hour news channel, operated by sister company e.Sat TV to the UK, might seem suicidally ambitious, but when you think about it, the idea makes a lot of sense.

For starters, I found out recently there are more than four million South African expats living abroad with the majority of them being in Australia, the UK and USA. That's a heck of a lot of people who right now get their news from home online. And online stats seem to indicate that plenty of them are very interested in what is going on in this neck of the woods.

Catalyst

These expats are certainly an interesting market and were probably the catalyst that prompted e.Sat TV to kick off going global by heading for the UK.

As group head of news, Patrick Conroy, said "This will give us access to over 10 million homes in the UK. What is really significant though is that we will have access to the South Africa expat community. If they want news from home it's just a click away"

Is it audacious to believe that eNews will be given a moment's notice by those 10 million homes in the UK and eventually millions more in the USA and Australia?

I don't believe so at all. It will take time, of course, but there is a strong argument for foreign viewers to want a home-grown African perspective to balance what they receive from Sky and BBC.

After all, that's what is making Al Jazeera as successful as it is.

Going global

The really big challenge for eNews will be when it needs to expand its news gathering capacity to major global hotspots, which it will have to do if it intends moving beyond just targeting expats and hoping for big international audiences.

That is going to require extremely deep pockets. It has tried sending news crews to the scenes of big stories in the past but clearly just hasn't had the capacity to stand alongside the big players. Its coverage of the Arab spring was pretty pedestrian to say the least, but at least it tried.

But e.tv is very good at doing little steps. When it was first launched no-one in the industry gave it a hope in Hades of becoming sustainable. When it made its first profit, it surprised a lot of people.

Pretty popular

It is now the most watched news service on the DStv bouquet. eNews *Prime Time* at 7pm on e.tv continues to grow its audience since it launched in 1999. It is the most watched English language news broadcast in South Africa with an average of three million viewers every night.

But, what really excites me about all this is that I have long argued that in order for South African television to remain sustainable it has to look abroad. Just as DStv has done.

It is also vital that if government is to keep insisting on local content quotas, that the local content that is produced is put together in a way that makes it saleable overseas.

Some of our soaps are incredibly expensive and because of their rigid parochial nature they are by no means exportable. Which is crazy.

News is just out too that SABC is also going to launch a 24-hour news channel but I somehow can't get as excited about that as I am about e.tv.

Quite simply because the very reason why e.tv prime time news is the most watched in the country, is that viewers just don't believe what they're being fed by the SABC. Until such time as the SABC gains a lot more credibility, its 24 news service will be just as poorly supported as its local bulletins are.

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