Ownership of any media has its own glamour and ideas of 'power' associated with it. But is it the same as or as easy as starting a new business? Sudeep Malhotra, a veteran of the satellite & cable television industry with over 25 years of industry experience under his belt, demystifies the process and takes a look at how to go about doing this!

When satellite television started in India in the early 90s, there was just Doordarshan to fill the TV screens in the country. Broadcast from local terrestrial transmitters placed in major cities across the country, it provided us with the standard 6 to 8 hours of programs daily, with the weekly ‘Chitrahaar’ and ‘Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan’ thrown in for good measure. The biggest attraction was the Sunday Hindi Feature Film! While Doordarshan still continues to do what it does best – now on a 24-hour basis; the chitrahaar music program has
sprouted several 24-hour music channels and the start interview programs have their own full time channels in Zoom TV, Bollywood Masala and E24! In the meantime, hundreds of privately owned television channels have sprouted in the past 15 years.

There are now close to 500 satellite delivered channels targeting India today that are registered with the Information & Broadcasting Ministry of the Government of India; either with a License to uplink signals from India or under the Downlink Policy of India. There are another 800 odd channels that are beamed from other neighboring countries in every conceivable language available for any enthusiast with a dish.

Is there place for more?
Yes…..!! At last count almost 150 more channels await the grant of permission to launch their services in the country.

The next series of successful channels in India will probably be the niche channels – catering to specific small target groups. The popularity of these channels, as well as their success, will increase proportionately with the increase in the digitization process of the cable networks and increased penetration of DTH in the country.

So let’s say that you have thought it over, looked at all of the pitfalls and want to now start a satellite channel of your own!!

Where do you start?
Of course, you have first to decide what type of channel you are interested in. A general entertainment channel? ….. Or a news channel, perhaps a music channel… or even a childrens

Myriad music programs are available in India, from mainstream channels like Zee Music, Sony Music, and T-Series, to niche channels like Radio City, Red FM, and Radio Mirchi. These channels cater to a wide range of music genres, from classical to pop, and feature live concerts, interviews, and music discussion programs.

At the same time, the number of private television channels in India has greatly increased, with over 1500 channels available today. These channels cover a wide range of genres, from news and current affairs to sports, movies, and entertainment. The success of these channels is largely due to the growing demand for television content in India, with over 90% of households owning a television set.

With the increasing penetration of DTH and cable networks, the demand for more channels is likely to continue. In fact, the government of India has approved the launch of over 150 new channels in the past five years, indicating a shift towards more niche content.

In conclusion, there is a lot of potential for new channels in India, particularly in the niche segments. With the right planning and execution, it is possible to launch a successful channel and reach a large audience.

Start your channel journey today and take advantage of the opportunities that the Indian television market has to offer.
channel or some other niche channel – perhaps food, adventure sports, golf, sailing, home & gardening, shopping, etc… there are hundreds of topics to choose from!

Then having done that, decide on a name – catchy and appropriate to the type of content the channel will provide. Run through the lists of channels available, that will give you an idea. (you can also check channels on the magazine website at www.scatmag.com in the ‘Industry Links’ section).

Then decide where you want to base it. Where the offices will be located and whether you will be able to employ qualified manpower to run the specific functions of the channel. Creative Head for the content, scheduling & programming, post production, graphics and editing of in-house programs – the city where you locate should have all of this pool of talent – or else you would have to offer great salaries to attract talent from other cities! Bombay, Delhi are the most popular if you are going to do a Hindi or English entertainment channel.

However do keep in mind that establishment costs in these two cities can be quite high, with office rent and services being expensive. The consolation is that since there are so many production houses, talent is easily available and potential advertisers are round every corner.

Bear in mind that if you are wanting to do a regional language channel, the best place to locate it will be in the state where that language is spoken, preferably in the capital of the state or in a city close to the capital. Of course if you are a News channel, then the capital is the ONLY place you have to be with bureaus in each of the district headquarters of the state!

That’s where the similarity with starting any other business will end!
STARTING TV CHANNEL

How viable or financially successful is it going to be?

The answer to that will depend on how careful you are in selecting your channel-type, how much money you intend to spend on it, how you plan to bring in the resources and how well you run the channel – as is true of any other company or business that you may start.

You have to first understand how the industry works, what is the competition you will face, from where are you going to source your raw material – your programmes; how much money would you want to spend on that?

Also then, how are you going to put together the content in terms of scheduling these, how you will distribute it – whether on cable networks or DTH platforms or even restrict it only to the internet, 3G streaming services on cellphones or just on IPTV platforms in various parts of the world!

Again, you would need to decide whether you would like to keep it a free-to-air channel, or would like to scramble it – asking cable network and viewers to pay for the same on a daily / monthly basis.

The marketing & promotion strategy is a major expense area. Press and outdoor advertising required to be done throughout the year take a huge toll of budgets.

Thus the three key areas will be the Programming mix, the distribution strategy and finally the marketing & promotion expenses.

The answers to all of these questions will decide how much of a success you can make of your channel.

In the next article in this series, we shall take a look at the technologies and outsourced facilities that need to be decided before the channel is launched, followed by the procedures you would have to go through to register your channel with the Government of India.