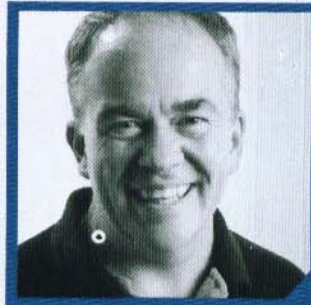


Cricket on cricket channel or general sports channel?



PETER HUTTON
COO, Taj Television Pvt. Ltd., Ten Sports

Ten Sports clearly has a problem. We now have too much live sport for a single sports channel. 5 cricket boards, WWE every day of the week, 3 national football leagues, the UEFA Champions and Europe leagues, the ATP tennis tour, the European golf tour, the American PGA tour are way too much content for one channel. Our challenge is to deal with that problem sensibly and creatively while paying respect to live sport that our audience deserves. As such we're weighing up our options as to how to deal with the problem. In the past one channel has worked fine, WWE, a range of international sport and our live cricket has meant we have always had the highest audience for a single sports channel on an annual basis.

However, the growth of a DTH audience means that there is now a potential audience for a wider variety of sports channels, unrestricted by the limitations of some cable operators to deliver sports content to their consumers. DTH can deliver multiple sports channels simultaneously, escaping the frustrations of knowing that a sports event is on live "somewhere" but not at your home. As a sports fan, the worst thing I see a sports channel doing is to "warehouse" rights, not showing events in full because they don't have the room to schedule the event properly. The second biggest culprit is someone showing a great event but that event not being available in the majority of homes.

If you look at Sky Sports in England or Supersport in Africa, you see that they will simultaneously run 7 or 8 channels of sport with all content having the possibility of popping up on all channels, there is no "cricket channel" or "football channel". They dominate their markets and give a great service to consumers by showing every major event from the sporting world live. From American football to netball, you see all manner of sports. If you're a sports fan, you buy the bouquet and you see the sporting world. In India, despite the growing number of channels, the sports fan doesn't receive such a great service. Channels based on cricketing repeats don't offer much new to an audience. A cricket channel would be great, but only if there is enough live content for the next few years to make it really provide quality.

We actually already produce a cricket channel for North America ("Cricket plus") and a cricket channel for the Middle East "Ten Sports Middle East", as well as 3 dedicated football channels for Asia "Goal TV 1, Goal TV 2 and the Football Channel". For us to produce a niche sports channel for India would be a relatively easy step. However, we need to be first assured that we are not letting down the dedicated and supportive audience that we have built for Ten Sports over the past 7 years.



PRASANNA KRISHNAN
COO - Neo Sports

It is quite apparent that cricket viewing in India goes well beyond watching a live cricket match. There is a very strong desire among a large segment of Indian cricket fans to get actively involved and participate in the sport to the extent possible. This is often in the form of voicing opinions, hearing experts speak or interact with them. Another form of active involvement is a desire to relive India's glorious cricketing moments over the years. And then there are a number of active viewers looking at the lighter side and / or masala aspects of the sport. Given this diverse range of requirements, selective coverage limited to live cricketing action is grossly inadequate from the Indian fans perspective.

It needs to be noted that the demand for cricket programming and associating with the sport is so high that cricket based shows consistently outperform and get greater viewership numbers than live action on most other sports. And this demand for cricket content is quite distinct from demand for other live sporting action of other sports. It is essential to recognize these distinct segments of demand and deliver content to them accordingly. These were some of the key findings of our research that led to the birth of Neo Cricket as the first cricket-only channel in the country and Neo Sports as an all sports channel providing quality sporting action in Football, Tennis, Golf, Badminton and Motor sports.

We have been consistently fine-tuning and customized our programming to cater to these varied interests through a number of highly successful cricket centric shows like Dial C for Cricket, Encounter, Cricket Tadka Marke, Ballebaaz, Great Indian Run Chase and many more on Neo Cricket, each of which have carved a strong following for themselves in their respective segments. And Neo Sports has carved a niche for itself among viewers with its quality delivery of European football leagues like Bundesliga and Serie A, the PGA Tour Golf, WTA Tour Tennis, ITF Davis and Fed Cup, MotoGP, Nascar and the like.

The approach catapulted Neo Cricket to the number 1 sports channel in India for the year 2008 (source TAM 2008) and enabled Neo Sports to get a dedicated set of viewers who passionately follow for its coverage of these other sports.