



NIGERIAN-born Alex Okosi always had a passion for entertainment and was lucky enough to land a job at MTV after graduating *magna cum laude* with a double major in business administration and economics from St Michael's College in Vermont, US.

"Working at MTV in the US was exciting and fast-paced, with a steep learning curve," he says.

"I joined as a co-ordinator within the integrated marketing division and was responsible for driving key initiatives that drove revenue for the business."

It became Okosi's dream to create an MTV channel for Africa, which subsequently resulted in other localised channels such as MTV (South Africa), MTV Base (Africa), Nickelodeon (Africa), Comedy Central (Africa) and BET Africa.

"Viacom is one of the biggest entertainment companies in the world and it boasted many media brands that I loved and respected," he says. "It has the biggest international footprint of any media company, which was exciting to me."

Now, in his role as senior vice-president and managing director, Okosi is responsible for overseeing strategic direction for the network's pan-African business operations across all its channels.

"I make the key decisions about what we do, the way our business is going, and who we partner with," he says. "I then work with our brand teams and functional heads to make sure that we achieve our goals."

Now celebrating 10 years of operations in Africa, Viacom International Media Networks delivers more channels to Africa than any other international network. And while the biggest

Driven by passion and 'sheer buzz'

As managing director of Viacom International Media Networks Africa, Alex Okosi plays a leading role in entertaining millions of television viewers across the continent every day, writes EUGENE YIGA



Alex Okosi represents Viacom in Africa, which has brands such as MTV, MTV Base, BET, VH1 Classic, Nickelodeon and Comedy Central.

distribution is in South Africa and Nigeria, the pan-African network's

collective footprint reaches over 48 territories and serves over 100 million viewers.

"My biggest challenge is deciding what not to do," he says. "There are so many great opportunities out there and we have so many brands and projects that we would love to activate in Africa. But we need to pick and choose carefully."

Okosi finds it helpful not to beat himself up about the things the company chooses not to do.

Instead, he focuses 100 percent on the opportunities they identify. And what makes it easier is the "sheer buzz" he gets from coming into the office every day.

"I love the entertainment business and I love that no two days are ever the same," he says.

"I love working in a creative industry where I meet and collaborate with innovative and interesting people at the top of their game every single day."

Looking back, Okosi says his top professional highlight would have to be convincing Viacom to launch the African business and first African TV channel (MTV Base) in 2005, as all the subsequent success – multiple channel launches, network growth and so on – was effectively spurred on by that one decision.

"We now boast 10 distinct channels, five online destinations, as well as multiple social media accounts," he says.

"We have numerous strategies for increasing viewership: launching new channels, finding new distribution outlets, keeping our programme schedules dynamic and relevant, investing in local content, increasing our marketing and social media presence, and by connecting with audiences at on-the-ground events."

Indeed, Okosi says that events "outside" television (like the BET Experience Africa) are significant in

allowing the company to connect with audiences and to let viewers "touch and feel" the brands. This brings the brands to life and increases audience connection to the relevant channels.

"We wanted to leverage the BET Experience to not only celebrate the launch of BET in Africa, but also to provide our consumers access to a definitive lifestyle festival on the continent," he says.

"Audiences can look forward to a day-long, jam-packed entertainment festival celebrating many different aspects of the urban experience including music, comedy, sports, fashion, Genius Talks and more. It will be a great day out and the first of many to come."

A Comedy Central stage will feature comedians including David Kau, Celeste Ntuli, Tats Nkonzo, Joey Rasdien, Jason Goliath, John Vlismas, Skhumba, and Kenyan funnyman Churchill.

And the star-studded concert stage will feature artists such as Maxwell (US), Raphael Saadiq (US), Tamar Braxton (US), AKA (South Africa), Young Thug (US), Flavour (Nigeria) and Diamond Platinumz (Tanzania).

"It aligns perfectly with our goals of uplifting, entertaining and empowering our audiences, and provides a great extension for them to experience the essence of our brand on the ground," says Okosi.

"In the first year, the plan is to create a multi-faceted event that engages with our audience on multiple levels, while setting the stage for an annual event which can grow and evolve over time."

● BET Experience Africa takes place at the Ticketpro Dome in Johannesburg on Saturday, December 12. Book at www.ticketpro.co.za

ARIES
21 MARCH – 20 APRIL

You need to retreat into yourself and be introspective. It's a beneficial cycle if you pay attention to that which expands your horizons. You will be able to see more clearly the direction in which you're going and signposts to success.

TAURUS
21 APRIL – 21 MAY

You need to clarify what is important to you and not dwell on things that bring you down. This requires you expressing how you feel and avoiding suppressing your true emotions. It's a time to build on previously difficult relationships.

GEMINI
22 MAY – 21 JUNE

Your emotional response influences your actions. Make sure you identify those emotions which hold you back. You need to overcome negative energy, which is affecting progress in your career. Pursue relationships that are beneficial to your future.

CANCER
22 JUNE – 23 JULY

Your aim in life needs to take into account the support available from those most close to you. Work is favourable but beware restrictions from influential parties. It's time to realise your path is tied to others' goodwill and the importance of being your authentic self.

LEO
24 JULY – 23 AUGUST

Your greatest wish is for a grand love and pure romance. This is a connection you can make with confidence, and brings good luck to your personal story. You can count on good fortune to arise from your sunny personality.

VIRGO
24 AUGUST – 23 SEPTEMBER

Acknowledge and don't hide your talents as this can impact on your performance and improve outcomes. Your professional direction will be influenced by you openly pushing forward. Don't stop, keep moving, success is within reach.

LIBRA
24 SEPTEMBER – 23 OCTOBER

Dialogue brings you closer to your goal of diplomacy and ideas of fairness. Exercise your intuition to achieve greater emotional intelligence and the assessment of situations. The art of conversation will bring you closer to the ultimate goal of realising your potential.

SCORPIO
24 OCTOBER – 22 NOVEMBER

Make your secret ambition known and you will find the recognition you crave. It's a time to be honest about your grand plans which involve love and war. Opportunities are bound to present themselves if you honour your abilities.

SAGITTARIUS
23 NOVEMBER – 21 DECEMBER

Your relationships will flourish if you keep the avenues of communication open. It is important to express your individuality and not be constrained by conformity. Your expansive personality will attract people who share your ambitions and world view.

CAPRICORN
22 DECEMBER – 20 JANUARY

Your career is based on relationships that incorporate good values, and your willingness to fight for your position of success. This week sees you going beyond the call of duty. Any constraints are overcome with a commitment to keep things simple.

AQUARIUS
21 JANUARY – 19 FEBRUARY

Hard work on relationships will result in an improvement in your stature. It's a good time to make changes to your personality and open new avenues to self-expression. The journey to self-actualisation is an open road.

PISCES
20 FEBRUARY – 20 MARCH

Advancement in your career is imminent, particularly if you put in that one last push. Expect rewards for large ideas with far-reaching effects. You will find relationships reach new heights and degrees of connection. Put in the effort and receive your blessings.

Under African skies

YOUR STARS

BY BARBARA KISELEV