

NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS

As the Senior Vice-President and Managing Director of Viacom International Media Networks Africa, Alex Okosi plays a leading role in entertaining millions of television viewers across the continent every single day.



Q What is your background?

I was born in Nigeria, attended St Michael's College (Vermont, USA) on a full basketball scholarship, and graduated magna cum laude with a double major in business administration and economics. I joined MTV Networks in 1998 and spent my first two years with the MTV Integrated Marketing team in New York, before moving to Los Angeles to work within the MTV Networks Affiliate Sales & Marketing division. In 2003, I joined the MTV Networks International Strategy & Business Development division based in London to pursue my ambition for MTV in Africa.

Q What drew you to a career in television?

I have always had a passion for entertainment and was lucky enough to land a job at MTV after university. I always asked myself, "Why don't we have our own MTV in Africa?" It became my dream to create an MTV channel for Africa and that has subsequently lead to other localised channels such as MTV (South Africa), MTV Base (Africa), Nickelodeon (Africa), Comedy Central (Africa) and now, finally, BET Africa.

Q What attracted you to Viacom?

Viacom is one of the biggest entertainment companies in the world and it boasted many media brands that I loved and respected. It also has the biggest international footprint of any media company, which was exciting to me, especially as I had a goal to establish a Viacom business in Africa.

Q What was it like when you first started your career?

Working at MTV in the USA was exciting and fast-paced, with a steep learning curve. I joined as a coordinator within the integrated marketing division and was responsible for driving key initiatives that drove revenue for the business.

Q What is your primary responsibility as a senior vice president and managing director?

I oversee strategic direction for our pan-African business operations across all our channels and lines of business.

Q How does this translate into what you do on a daily basis?

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

Q What's difficult or challenging about your job?

My biggest challenge is deciding what NOT to do. 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.

Q How do you deal with this?

I don't beat myself up about the things we can't do but focus 100 percent on the ones that we have identified.

Q What do you love most about your work?

I love the entertainment business and I love that no two days are ever the same. I love working in a creative industry, where I meet and collaborate with innovative and interesting people who are at the top of their game.

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Q What would someone find surprising about your work?

The sheer buzz I get out of coming into the office every single day.

Q What's been your top professional highlight so far?

I think it would have to be convincing Viacom to launch our Africa business and first African TV channel (MTV Base) in 2005, as all our subsequent success – multiple channel launches, network growth, and so on – was effectively spurred on by that one decision.

Q What are the viewership numbers and growth for Viacom's channels across Africa?

Viacom International Media Networks Africa's suite of channels reaches more than 100 million viewers in Africa. We now boast 10 distinct channels and five online destinations, as well as multiple social media accounts.

Q Where are your biggest markets?

Our biggest distribution is in South Africa and Nigeria, but we are a pan-African network with distribution in 48-plus territories.

Q How do you plan to grow viewership across the continent?

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 connecting with audiences at on-the-ground events.

Q What effect do events outside of television have in driving growth?

Events of this stature are significant in allowing us to connect with our audience and to let them touch and feel our brands; to bring the brands to life and to increase their connection to the relevant channel.

Q What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Sports, travel, hanging out with friends, and spending time with my son. **E**

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