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WVVH-TV becoming affiliate of resorts network

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In a move that could heat up the battle for viewers on the East End, WVVH-TV has signed on to become an affiliate of RSN, a network that provides programming to about 100 resorts nationwide.

WVVH-TV, also known as Hamptons Television, will broadcast four hours of RSN shows daily as of June 27, including a morning show designed to be an anchor.

Hamptons TV will obtain new content targeting younger viewers and an infusion of national advertisers such as Jeep, Chevrolet, BMW, Visa and Captain Morgan who advertise on RSN.

RSN in turn gets access to a hot resort market and programming that Hamptons TV provides, such as the Hampton Classic Horse Show, which can be picked up at affiliates.

The deal is structured as an advertising revenue sharing arrangement with the two organizations splitting income from shows provided by RSN.

Hamptons TV, which competes with Wainscott-based Plum TV on the South Shore and also reaches the North Shore, will cut back on old westerns and provide more programming about everything from extreme sports to fishing.

They're geared for a young, active demographic, said Ernie Schimizzi, president of WVVH-TV. The benefit of that is it appeals to the upscale viewers interested in enjoying life. And advertisers are interested in reaching that demographic.

Portland, Maine-based RSN, founded in 1986, has grown to a network of 27 affiliated stations, reaching about 100 resort markets, primarily winter vacation spots, which the firm says reaches more than one million cable subscribers.

Richard Bilodeau, vice president of marketing for RSN, which owns six stations and provides programming from Sugar Loaf, Maine to Lake Tahoe, Calif. and Key West, Fla., has been seeking to stretch to both sandy and snowy resorts.

Our beach spots are growing, said Bilodeau of the firm that has five affiliates in the Southeast, including one in South Carolina and four in Florida, along with a New York affiliate in Lake Placid. The Hamptons is another beach market. We've been trying to diversify our content offering and strategy. We're trying to reach the ski and 'defrost' market.

The alliance is also designed to better position WVVH-TV to compete with Plum TV, which broadcasts on the South Shore and competes against RSN in other resort markets.

WVVH-TV is carried on Cablevision channel 78 and over the air on channel 50.

Plum TV operates on the South Fork, in Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, Vail and Aspen.

Plum TV hopes to grow its own resort network by entering markets such as Palm Beach, Fla.; Stowe, Vt.; Napa Valley, Calif.; Carmel, Calif., and Park City, Utah.

I think this programming definitely is the national version of what channels like Plum are trying to be, Schimizzi said. These people wrote the book on it.

Bilodeau said RSN seeks to focus more on sports, while Plum TV is more lifestyle oriented. Plum TV didn't comment for this story.

We don't believe we compete with them. We tend to have information and entertainment programs that cater to folks who value the outdoor lifestyle, Bilodeau added. Plum TV is trying to cater to folks with a very high income level.

Both have affiliates in Vail, where RSN focuses more on skiing and snowboarding, and Plum TV targets a luxury lifestyle such as shopping and real estate, Bilodeau said.

New programs on Hamptons TV will include the RSN morning show, which Hamptons TV will tailor to the East End by inserting weather and other content designed to give a local flare.

But can the same programming appeal to sun worshippers on the East End and snowbirds in Colorado?

Certain mountain communities like Lake Tahoe actually have more summer visitors than winter visitors, said Bilodeau. If you look at most ski resorts, they're no longer only a ski resort. They're diversifying their services to attract people year round.

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