



VIP Passport – set to premiere on Fox affiliates

Five alive

International Broadcast Communications is celebrating its fifth anniversary this month. **David Jenkinson** catches up with founder Jon Helmrich to find out how the company's first half-decade has gone.

Founded in October 2001 by former HBO and E! Entertainment executive Jon Helmrich, International Broadcast Communications (IBC) distributes more than 1,000 hours of specialist factual programming in the entertainment, fashion, sports and lifestyle genres.

Running his own distribution business was always an option for Helmrich. And five years ago, following a management reshuffle at E!'s Hollywood channel business, he went it alone, launching IBC on the back of his expertise in the glamorous end of the programming spectrum.

During the past five years the business has grown quickly, with Helmrich picking up programming for his own catalogue while repping Canadian broadcaster CHUM's international channels business. A year ago he also picked up the contract to take Rainbow Media's Voom HD channels around the world and is close to signing his first deal. "Voom is a package of 16 channels," says Helmrich. "I think within the next few months we'll sign off on the first international deal for Voom Showcase, which is a reversioned channel based on the best content from the bouquet."

IBC's best-performing series, and the bedrock for much of its other development, is *Famous* from Popular Arts Entertainment's Entertainment News Service, which has sold from the US to Japan. Now in its fifth season on The Biography Channel it has opened a lot of doors for IBC.

Airing on channels in 20 territories worldwide, the weekly half-hour celeb-driven entertainment series has sold to Israel's Tel Ad Broadcasting

(Biography and E!), Hungary's 4TV and Benelux's Star! (a joint venture between Non Stop Television and CHUM).

Since April this year, when IBC hit a benchmark 20 markets for the series, the company has added *Famous* to the upcoming schedules of programming outlets in Italy, Japan, Korea and Russia. The most significant of the new deals, brokered by IBC's director of sales Bruce Rabinowitz, includes all 104 episodes of the celebrity biography series, which will debut on Italy's Marco Polo TV, the private cable and satellite channel owned and operated by Sitcom. The outlet will begin airing season one this fall.

IBC has also sold the series to Sony's AXN cable network in Japan and South Korea's Club Channel, owned and operated by Zonemedia. AXN Japan premiered season three of *Famous* beginning in September 2006, while Club launched the series with season one in the same month. National Cable Networks, a new cable channel in Russia, has signed up for 52 episodes and will begin airing

the series when the channel launches in October.

"As we enter our fifth year in global programming distribution and channel development, *Famous* continues to generate incredible interest from buyers around the world," says Helmrich. "Each new season delivers a fresh crop of Hollywood's most interesting personalities and most illustrious events – elements the world's television audience continues to clamour for."

New for IBC's 'anniversary Mipcom' is *VIP Passport*, a one-hour reality series built around "famous people partying fabulously." It is produced by Lux Entertainment out of Las Vegas, and will premiere in October on Fox affiliate stations in the US. The initial order is for 13 hours.

Helmrich has also been busy on the channels front. He recently signed a deal with Entertainment Park – launching at the end of October in Russia – for 360 hours of CHUM programming. "Throughout the five years I think the rewarding thing has been to pick the right partners and programmes to work with," says Helmrich. "We are offered so much material that it is easy to lose sight of what the business is all about. I invest in things on a gut level, and so far that has proved successful."

Looking ahead, IBC is set on a firm development path for the next five years. "We'll continue to develop the channels business on behalf of Voom and CHUM," says Helmrich. "The business is changing fast, and the arrival of more HD internationally, and IPTV, is going to have a steady impact. As far as the catalogue goes, we are still focused on developing more entertainment franchises in the reality series arena and will be looking for new shows to add to the library at Mipcom. The success of the next five years will be as much about making the right programming choices as the first five were." ■



Helmrich – after new shows