



MEDIAWEEK

AETN's Raven boosts budget 20% over last year's \$500 million.

AETN to Spend \$600 Mil. on New Series, Web

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A&E Television Networks will continue to funnel money into original series development, earmarking \$600 million that will be invested in programming, as well as new media initiatives.

The budget represents a 20 percent increase over last year's \$500 million spend.

In an upfront presentation in New York Tuesday morning, AETN president and CEO Abbe Raven reminded media buyers that the company's big-bucks approach has allowed it to acquire off-net franchises like *The Sopranos* and *CSI: Miami* for the flagship channel, while helping to continue the growth of its unscripted series slate, which includes *Dog the Bounty Hunter* and *Gene Simmons' Family Values*.

"Now [executive vp and general manager] Bob DeBitetto and his team...are in the third phase, developing several signature drama series for A&E," Raven said, by way of introduction to a development slate of five new scripted dramas and a miniseries based on *The Andromeda Strain*, the 1971 killer-microbe theatrical penned by author Michael Crichton.

The five new projects in the hopper join the slate of six projects A&E announced at the Television Critics Association confab in January. A&E plans to go into production on at least one of the dramas in time for a 2008 debut, marking the first time the net has committed to an original scripted series since it bowed Sidney Lumet's *100 Centre Street* in January 2001.

Led by senior vp, drama programming Tana Nugent Jamieson, who a year ago was tapped to head A&E's newly-opened Los Angeles development office, most of the 11 projects square nicely with the net's crime-and-punishment ethos.

Among the new projects announced Tuesday are the FBI drama *The Beast*, a pair of cop operas (*Homestead*, *Under*), the intervention fable *The Cleaner* and *Takedown*, which chronicles an ongoing U.S. Marshals manhunt.

A&E's TCA slate included an untitled Steven Bochco legal strip, two procedurals and a potboiler about a crack NYPD antiterrorism unit.

In the near term, production on the four-hour remake of *The Andromeda Strain* will begin this summer. Sibling filmmakers Ridley Scott (*Alien*, *Gladiator*) and Tony Scott (*True Romance*, *Top Gun*) have signed on as executive producers.

While the scripted series mark a departure of sorts for A&E, the net hasn't turned its back on its bread and butter, lining up four unscripted series and a pair of reality pilots. The latter includes *The Pendeltons*, a projected spin-off of A&E's tattoo-parlor strip *Inked*, and the previously

announced *The Two Coreys*, which stars *Lost Boys* Corey Haim and Corey Feldman in a real-life simulacrum of *You, Me & Dupree*.

The A&E upfront comes on the heels of a stellar first quarter, which saw the net boost its overall prime-time audience 54 percent versus the year-ago period, to 1.54 million viewers, thanks in large part to its high-profile launch of *The Sopranos* in January. A&E also upped its delivery of adults 18-49 by 43 percent, making it fifth among all ad-supported cable during the quarter, while raising its profile among adults 25-54 by 41 percent, good for a fourth-place finish behind USA Network, TNT and TBS.

Three years ago, A&E was relegated to nearly 20th place among the core demos, Raven said.

As has been the case with most cable networks this upfront season, A&E is pitching buyers and clients on engagement. "Television is still the most powerful medium to advertise on," Raven said. "Smart companies with smart advertising partners are finding creative solutions to maximize engagement with these viewers and we plan to be at the forefront.

"Our viewers are heavily invested in our content and we guarantee you a powerful platform for your messages," Raven added.

On Monday AETN's The History Channel announced its development slate, which included four new specials and a number of additions to its History.com site. Most notably, History has landed a skein of 94 new half-hour documentaries from *Star Wars* creator George Lucas.