

Linda Jensen

CEO, HBO Central Europe

Region: **Central Europe**

Local hero

While the power of the HBO and Cinemax brands are still delivering healthy subscriber increases across 13 markets in Central and Eastern Europe, the CEO of HBO Central Europe Linda Jensen has her eyes firmly fixed on the next generation and her strategies are both revealing and sobering.

“We need to have an ability to put our content on a multiple of platforms as the business models shake themselves out,” says Jensen. “At the same time we have to make sure that we aren’t trading broadcast dollars for digital cents.”

Jensen still believes in the customer-service model of growing subscribers through local operator platforms be they DTH, cable, IPTV or DTT.

Over the last several years, HBO has rolled out subscription VoD services through its platform partners called HBO On Demand and HD versions of HBO and Cinemax are available across many of its markets. All this has helped fuel subscriber growth that has quadrupled HBO’s sub base over the last six years in the region to an estimated nearly 4 million subscribers.

But the premium content provider from the USA known for glossy and gritty drama like *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under* and *The Pacific*, also has broadband trials running in Poland on cable operator UPC Polska and plans are close to being finalised to roll out the first operator-delivered broadband to PC service called HBO Go by the end of this year.

Making sure that HBO brands are available where customers want them is particularly important for the younger generation, says Jensen. “We have to create a net habitat to support the younger generation to stimulate visitation and usage, because young people do different things with their time.

“We did some research out of our Czech office and one of the younger viewers said that linear TV is for your grandmother. That’s what the younger generation thinks, so we need to be prepared.”

A key plank in HBO Central Europe’s business plan is locally produced content.

Why exploring new business models and creating premium local content is key to HBO’s central European business plan

Jensen is a realist about what the internet is doing to erode the value of premium content. “You can Bit Torrent down all the international content, so we have to create some compelling reasons to subscribe.” Her answer is: locally produced content featuring local talent.

HBO Central and Eastern Europe will produce 16 to 20 local documentaries this year (up from 12 in 2009) as well as the company’s first-ever localised drama – a Romanian version of an Israeli format known to UK and US audiences as *In Treatment* starring Romanian actor Marcel Iures. More are in the works, including local *In Treatment* versions in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Jensen’s goal is to produce two local series in each of HBO’s core markets (Poland, Czech/Slovakia, Hungary and Romania) every year. “Fiction drama series are important for on demand usage,” explains Jensen. “There is also value in the local aspect. We intend to create local brand affinity by having events and programming that convince users that no matter how rough the transition in the future is between various media that there is value in (paying for) HBO.” **KB**

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