Kristina Hollstein
Director of Documentary Co-production and Development
ZDF Enterprises

In her role at ZDF Enterprises’ documentary co-productions department, Kristina Hollstein has a broad brief that allows her to work in a range of factual genres, from epic historical specials laden with archive footage or reenactments to projects on science and technology featuring the latest in CGI to blue-chip wildlife fare.

The projects also come to Hollstein’s division in a variety of forms, including ZDF commissions from independent producers that the division will represent either just in German-speaking markets or globally. ZDF Enterprises also comes on board as a co-producer on titles initiated by the likes of the BBC and Channel 4 that can air in prime-time slots on ZDF. As often, if not more so, Hollstein signs on broadcasters such as Discovery Channel and NHK as partners on ZDF-originated documentaries. With such a diversity of projects, however, has come a much more challenging rights negotiation landscape, Hollstein notes. “It has become very difficult,” she says. “There’s online rights, archive rights—you have to keep all of these in mind, you need to know who you are going to negotiate with and what rights you might need.”

Hollstein joined ZDF in 1996, attracted to the prospect of focusing on the factual genre. She was also well-acquainted with the challenges of financing content, after doing her doctorate thesis on film financing in Germany and France.

In terms of current trends in the factual genre, Hollstein says that “science, engineering and technology programming is doing quite well” and she cites Update: The World in 50 Years as having been one of ZDF’s top sellers.

Another trend in the market is interest in China, as broadcasters gear up for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. ZDF’s China-themed projects at MIPCOM, all of which take a historical look at the country, include Siege in Beijing: The Boxer Rebellion of 1900. “We will also bring a project on India,” Hollstein adds. The two-part production, Great India, filmed in HD, is expected to be ready for delivery next summer.

The challenge for ZDF going forward, Hollstein says, will be finding ways to tap into new-media applications in order to broaden the appeal of the documentary genre. “It’s very important to look at websites, mobile programming, to see how we can combine traditional documentary formats with new media to find and attract younger audiences.”

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