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The land where crime pays

Want to do business in Germany? Get yourself a strong roster of crime drama and know your audience, the experts tell Andy Fry

GIVEN the size of the German market and its pivotal role in the international content business, it pays to know what makes the market tick, says Maximilian Bolenius, senior vice-president sales & distribution for German-speaking Europe, Central & Eastern Europe, Russia & CIS at FremantleMedia International: "One of the most important things to have to be suc-

cessful in Germany is local knowledge and market intelligence. This feeds into a smart distribution strategy that can incorporate this unique market's parameters. On-the-ground knowledge can help establish the most consistent and straightforward approach to rights and windowing in a time of increasing competition and blurring lines between categories like catch-up, stacking and box sets."

Bolenius emphasises the importance of having a diverse catalogue, though he also argues that having strong scripted output sourced from producers across the US, UK and Scandinavia is also vital to success as the competition for this content is a lot higher in Germany than in other markets."

This last point echoes the opinion of all3media International sales manager Jon-



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Sebastian Debertin

sales and distribution at Content Television, echoes Bolenius: "Germany has always been one of our primary placement territories for key launch drama and non-fiction programming. But as with all major territories it is a complex and fast-moving market, so it's essential that we thoroughly research and understand the trends and influences that are impacting it now and will impact it in the future — from those unique to the country to global trends in consumption. In our view, it's now vital for us to work with our production partners from the outset to ensure the programming we deliver offers a seamless cross-platform experience to viewers."

WDRmg's head of content Stefanie Fischer emphasises the importance of the way you conduct yourself: "Germans are said to be very punctual and precise. If you have a meeting with a German business partner, it won't hurt to be on time and well prepared. Then again such national peculiarities may just be preconceptions. When you're working with professionals from all over the world, the best strategy is to be open-minded, versatile and respectful towards different backgrounds."

ZDF Enterprises president and CEO Alexander Coridass seems to support Fischer's observations about the precision engineering approach of German firms: "It is certainly important not only to know the products you're selling and your clients' needs very well, but to also understand the German market and its particular rules and regulations. The German market is very competitive — it is perhaps the most competitive in the world — and German managers concentrate intensely on two objectives: programme success and product quality. They want their company to be the best, and they want it to have the best products. Managers and their teams are strongly product oriented, confident that a good product will sell itself. But managers also place a high premium on customer satisfaction, and Germans pay close attention to a valued customer's wishes. Key principles for German

managers and companies are quality, responsiveness, dedication and follow-up."

Kids channel KiKA's veteran head of fiction, acquisitions & co-productions Sebastian Debertin also puts store by long-term relationships: "Being responsible for all contract negotiations with national and international partners, I follow a strategy of building long-term relationships with our partners. That takes a lot of time and effort on both sides, but in the long run, it helps by avoiding too many contractual discussions over the years. I want to build relationships that take both sides' needs into account early, so we are able to concentrate on the content side of co-developing and co-producing great programmes."

Debertin says it is not possible to cut corners when creating a German version of an international show — but stresses that care and attention during preparation can pay off for everyone: "We care a lot about getting a superb dub of an international programme. This isn't just because the German audience is so demanding when it comes to a perfect German adaptation but also because it gives our international partners the chance to exploit the German version on all platforms and levels."

Patrick Elmendorff, CEO of leading animation firm Studio 100 Media, adds that knowledge of the German audience and their attitude towards television is important: "The average daily time spent on television in German-speaking countries for example is way below the average of other European countries like Italy, Poland or Turkey. Also, television in Germany and the other German-speaking countries in Europe is still mainly influenced by public broadcasters who are bound to represent common values regarding educational and ethical issues. Private TV channels, pay-TV and global networks have been introduced at a later stage and need more time to establish themselves in Germany than they have had in other countries."

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Midsomer Murders. ©all3media International/Bentley Productions

athan Hughes who says: "If you have good crime drama, doing business in Germany is easy as they work really well there — Midsomer Murders is a prime example and has built a solid audience over the years. ZDF is keen on good European crime series and will co-produce if the right project comes about. It's also very profitable doing business there so the right project can earn good revenue for producers and distributors."

Jonathan Ford, executive vice-president