

Multichannel NEWS

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Soundtrack Eyeing a Fall Curtain

By R. THOMAS UMSTEAD

A new digital channel featuring music videos from theatrical films and TV shows is poised to make its U.S. debut this fall.

The Soundtrack Channel (STC) — headed by former E! Entertainment executive Bill Lee — will feature music videos created for current and older films, as well as movie-based music programming exclusive to the channel.

STC, co-owned by Lee, Sweden-based Millennium Media Group and U.S.-based media conglomerate Gaylord Entertainment, is currently distributed in Brazil and Australia.

Lee said he's talking with several operators about launching as a digital service in the U.S. later this fall. While the network will feature theme songs and other music from television shows, 90 percent of the programming will be based on music from the movies.

He believes the channel will become a hit with both young viewers interested in the latest music and current movies, and with older audiences seeking out vintage music from popular films of the past.

STC will also provide viewers with entertainment news, celebrity interviews and information on new theatrical releases.

For operators, the channel affords a cross-promotional tool to help tout their emerging video-on-demand services.

"We're offering programming that directly supports the cable operators' greatest programming draw — movies," Lee said.

effit from the service, because it's a platform to promote upcoming films and older movies that might be released on home video or DVD. The network may also proffer interactive elements that could aid in the sale of music CDs and video product.

"We're bringing to the market a unique opportunity to take advantage of the popularity of movies and music," Lee said.

Unlike other network start-ups, STC's international feed will help reduce the major financial investment needed to prep the network for U.S. distribution, said Lee.

Lee would not reveal the network's rate card. Like other digital networks, though, STC could launch free of charge to operators for the first few years, according to sources.

Lee hopes to launch in about 20 to 30 percent of the digital universe by the end of 2002.

STC, however, will have to compete with several other music video-based networks that have already launched or are expected to bow soon.

Among the other digital music channel entries: VH1 Classic, VH1 Mega Hits, VH1 Soul and VH1 Country; BET Gospel and BET Hip Hop; and MTV Jams and MTV Hits.

Lee believes the network's entertainment-based programming will help differentiate STC from the rest.

"Viewers won't be able to get the music videos that we provide because the other music video outlets don't or won't play them," Lee said. "In addition, STC provides operators with marketing and promotional opportunities for VOD that