



Atlas Sets Up Documentary Unit First Feature to Focus on Meat Loaf

By JOHN DEMPSEY

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Atlas Media, one of the most active producers of nonfiction programming for a dozen cable networks, has set up a division to develop and produce theatrical documentaries. The first feature-length project, put together with Voom HD Networks, will focus on a behind-the-scenes look at Meat Loaf as he goes about prepping for an 18-month worldwide tour.

Bruce David Klein, president and exec producer of Atlas, said Voom HD's theatrical division has exclusive distribution to the Meat Loaf movie in the U.S. and Universal has bought the DVD rights. Atlas has the movie for territories outside the U.S.

"Theatrical documentaries are a natural evolution for us," Klein said, "because Atlas has produced all forms of nonfiction programming over the years, from docu soaps to how-to programs to cooking shows. But our specialty is storytelling."

By bringing in partners such as Voom HD, the New York-based Atlas can spend up to \$2 million on one docu, he said.

But the second theatrical on Atlas' slate, "Robert Blecker Wants Me Dead," will be much more cost-effective. Blecker is one of the most passionate advocates of the death penalty, and the docu deals with his 18-month interaction with an unusual death-row inmate named Daryl Holton, who is not appealing his sentence.

Klein said Atlas may end up distributing the Blecker docu inhouse, adding that it lends itself to plenty of Internet cross-promotion, such as a designated Web site with links to organizations that both support and oppose the death penalty.

Spearheading the theatrical division are two veteran Atlas execs: Kaki Kirby, executive VP of business development, and Cheryl Houser, executive VP of programming.

For theatricals without a production partner, Klein said, "I might take the film-festival route," hoping to build up interest and land a distributor.

"But we have a fallback," he said. If a docu doesn't spark interest at the film festivals, he continued, "we can repackage it as a one-hour special and sell it to a TV network."

Atlas produced 12 original series and specials in 2006, among them "Dr. G: Medical Examiner" for Discovery Health, "It Could Happen Tomorrow" for the Weather Channel, "American Eats" for History Channel and "Behind the Bash with Giada DeLaurentiis" for the Food Network.