ZDF Studios: Covering The Full Value Chain

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Apart from ZDF Studios' usual sprawling catalog full of high-quality programs with proven success in international territories, the company has made very good progress in building new businesses alongside its B2B dealings with broadcasters and streamers. "We now have strong and growing B2C or B2B2C businesses, which deliver a constantly growing contribution to our overall revenue mix," says Dr. Markus Schäfer, president and CEO of ZDF Studios.

On top of that, the ZDF Studios Group's value proposition to the market has become much clearer since last year's rebranding, Schäfer says. "We operate more than 30 direct and indirect subsidiaries and affiliates in Germany, the Netherlands and the U.K., spanning TV production, distribution and services. The companies of the ZDF Studios Group cover the entire value chain from the development of scripted and unscripted TV content to production, marketing and monetizing, including TV and streaming licenses as well as merchandising and online rights."

The new brand—having changed from ZDF Enterprises to ZDF Studios—helped to convey the message to the market that the company is not just a distribution business, "which is our heritage, but we really cover the full value chain," says Schäfer. "As such, we appeal to a much broader range of partners in the international market."

There's some standout premium drama on offer from the company, including the eco-thriller *The Swarm*, produced by Frank Doelger (*Game of Thrones*) and ndF International Production's managing director, Eric Welbers, and based on Frank Schätzing's international bestseller. Chronicling the struggle of humankind against an unknown enemy demonstrating swarm intelligence that lives in the depths of the sea, the series is distributed jointly by ZDF Studios and Beta Film.

Clean Sweep is a new thriller drama that premiered on Sundance Now in the U.S. and RTÉ in Ireland. It stars the award-winning Irish actress Charlene McKenna as a housewife and mother of three, married to a Garda detective, who kills her former partner in crime when he threatens to expose her dark past. The series is inspired by true events.

Dear Vivi, written and produced by Natalie Scharf, is part crime thriller and part drama. It tells the tragic story of a seemingly perfect German family whose world falls to pieces when the father suddenly kills his wife in the heat of the moment and ends up in custody awaiting trial. The series has set new records in the ZDFmediathek, German broadcaster ZDF's online media library, and an average of 5.6 million people tuned in on TV, a 20 percent market share. The series has also gained record TikTok followers and fan edits: over 23,000 followers and half a million likes within three weeks of its launch.

In the way of factual highlights, ZDF Studios is presenting *The Six Continents Revealed*, spotlighting the geological and cultural-historical biography of the world, revealing how nature has shaped and influenced cultures. It uses realistic 3D animations to take viewers on a journey through time to experience drifting continental plates, sinking land masses, explosive volcanoes and raging storms.

From ZDF Studios affiliate doclights comes the wildlife one-off *Bison—An American Icon*, looking at an important figure of the North American wilderness.

From the Junior catalog, *Spellbound* is a high-concept series that combines ballet, magic, witchcraft and more, with diversity and inclusivity at the heart of the production.

Meanwhile, the live-action series *Superhero Academy* is aimed at 6- to 10-year-olds and features a mix of drama and comedy. It follows first-graders who attend a very unusual boarding school for future superheroes.

Targeting preschoolers, the 3D animated series *Maari—Adventures at the Reef* spotlights a young squid and her two best friends—Tuts the turtle and Fin the crab—as she solves problems in the Blue Bay Reef. The show features diversity and environmental protection as core themes.

Gearing up for the year to come, ZDF Studios plans to continue working on creating further synergies between the companies within its group, Schäfer says. "The positioning of ZDF Studios as an integrated media company enables the development of innovative, outstanding and high-quality programs and makes the Group an attractive workplace for German and international talent to flourish in a very inspiring and creative environment. Looking ahead, we believe we will become an even more interesting partner in the international market for both sides of the business, for buyers as well as creative and production partners."