

MSNBC is going to the movies

By Steven Zeitchik

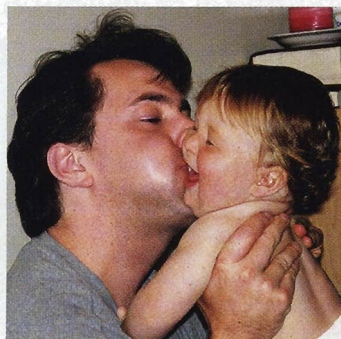
NEW YORK — MSNBC is creating MSNBC Films, a banner that will serve as a financing instrument for feature-length documentaries and turn the cable channel into more of a player in the feature world.

While each deal will be structured differently, the news network could contribute to everything from development and production for films to marketing and P&A for a movie's theatrical release. In exchange, it will typically receive television-airing rights, branding benefits and credit on the films.

The movies generally will fall into subject areas that MSNBC already covers but might also push the definitions. "We're constantly expanding what we're interested in reporting on," said Michael Rubin, vp longform programming.

MSNBC now commissions docu-style programming like its "Lockup" series and also has bought TV rights to theatrical docus including "Super Size Me." But this move will increase the number of feature-length docus on the net from about three per year to as many as six.

The first movie under the deal will be "Dear Zachary," Kurt Kuenne's harrowing look at a man who was killed by his pregnant girlfriend. The movie, which debuted at Slamdance in the winter, was a breakout with audiences at the recent Silverdocs festival. Its crime theme fits with MSNBC's



"Dear Zachary" is the first docu under deal.

longform interests.

Negotiations for "Zachary" are under way with a theatrical distributor, but MSNBC will contribute to the film's theatrical marketing campaign. MSNBC's Rubin, Scott Hooker and Elise Warner will join Kuenne as producers on the film.

"There's so much negativity now toward documentaries," said Submarine Entertainment's Josh Braun, who helped structure the deal for "Zachary" as well as for MSNBC Films. "But there is a market for them; people just have to work harder to make sure they get out there in the right way." **THR**

A&E pins president

By Kimberly Nordyke

Robert DeBitetto has been tapped to president and GM of A&E Network and Bio Channel.

DeBitetto, who had been executive vp and GM since 2005, will be responsible for content across all platforms for A&E and Bio (formerly Biography) as well as Crime & Investigation Network. He continues to oversee programming, strategic planning, acquisitions, consumer marketing, brand development, public relations and on-air promotions