

Amazon bets big on Europe as it takes on Netflix

October 3 2018, by Rosie Scammell, Martine Pauwels



US actor Rachel Brosnahan posed on the red carpet for the World premiere of Amazon's "The Romanoffs" in central London on Tuesday

Amazon is firing a new salvo in its global battle with Netflix for the booming online streaming market—and it features Julia Roberts and

descendants of Russia's tsars.

The US internet shopping leader is investing an estimated \$4.5 billion (4.0 billion euros) in streaming content through its Amazon Prime Video service this year.

That figure is likely to grow further as it tries to catch up to the nearly \$8 billion now being ploughed annually into content by industry pioneer Netflix.

A part of Amazon's strategy is a focus on Europe—still more reliant on traditional TV than the United States—as it seeks to build on a subscription base that has already reached 100 million people in 200 countries.

"Our goal is to just find the best, most compelling, addictive, exciting shows," Amazon Studios chief Jennifer Salke told AFP.

"It is so important for us that we create a global home for talent," she said. "It's about the world and really starting with European territories."

Prime Video Europe vice president Jay Marine added that streaming was not a winner-take-all market because the growth trend seemed unlikely to sputter any time soon.

"There will be multiple winners. Customers will use multiple services," said Marine.

'Budgets matching aspirations'

The new Amazon series lineup includes "Mad Men" creator Matthew Weiner's "The Romanoffs"—an anthology about people who think they are descendants of the last Russian tsar.

Roberts brings her star power to a 10-episode psychological thriller called "Good Omens".

It is an apocalyptic tale that marches through the centuries and had previously been seen as too ambitious and costly for a screen adaptation.

"Good Omens" novel co-author Neil Gaiman told AFP that co-productions between traditional broadcasters and online platforms were opening up new opportunities.

Amazon teamed up with the BBC for the series as it was preparing to go global last December.

"We're incredibly lucky right now. We are in a golden age of television," Gaiman told AFP while filming one of the episodes in London in November.

"We're in a place where our budget can match our aspirations".

Briton Michael Sheen plays an angel in the series and feels like he is in the middle of something exciting —and very big.

"Everyone's going... 'What's the next thing to watch?' So there's clearly an appetite for it, which is why so many things are being made and the material is really good, and there's budget for it," he told AFP.

'Great local products'

Amazon's focus on Europe is not only a strategic choice but also a matter of necessity.

The European Union has imposed a quota requiring streaming services to ensure at least 30 percent of their content is local programming.

European creative division director Georgia Brown said Amazon would "maintain a significant investment in Europe" but provided no concrete figures.

The new European lineup includes a Spanish series about the country's fervently followed La Liga football division called "Six Dreams".

The Franco-German comedy "Deutsch-les-Landes" meanwhile picks apart the culture clash created when a German company moves its staff to a sleepy village in France.

Amazon's Prime Video actually has six original German productions to choose from.

"Beat" director Marco Kreuzpaintner said German films and shows were previously largely limited to the domestic market because relatively few outside the country spoke the language.

Now "you can reach a global audience and show that there are great local products," he said.

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