

Tinopolis gambles on five new poker TV series

Television producer Tinopolis is making inroads into the high-stakes world of poker programming.

Its Sunset+Vine subsidiary – acquired by Tinopolis through its takeover of The Television Corporation – yesterday announced it would produce five new gaming-themed series with a contract value of GBP 4m.

It puts Tinopolis of Llanelli in competition with Cardiff's Presentable, which has created some of the UK's most popular poker programmes and has recently been bought by the RDF media group.

A spokesman yesterday said Sunset+Vine „is set to become the UK's biggest independent producer in the fast-growing programming area of gaming“.

This year it will generate more than 85 hours of gaming programming.

The company has won commissions for two series sponsored by PokerStars.com – the European Poker Tour, which has just completed recording in seven casinos around Europe, and the World Cup of Poker 2006. This team event will be shot in Barcelona in the summer.

Another new series, the Interpoker.com University Poker Clash, which will crown the best student poker players, will be recorded in June.

Sunset+Vine has also won orders from Challenge for two celebrity-based series.

Showbiz Poker will feature celebrity players including footballer Teddy Sheringham, businessman and Dragon's Den star

Duncan Bannatyne, actor Dexter Fletcher and Band of Brothers star Jamie Bamber.

Showbiz Blackjack will seek to repeat the success of poker with this popular card game.

The programming is executive produced by John Leach and Jane Fletcher.

All of the programming will air in Challenge's late-night casino entertainment slot and will also be shown on entertainment channel, Player, as well as being distributed internationally.

Ron Jones, executive chairman of Tinopolis, said, „Gaming is one of the fastest-growing areas in UK television. Sunset+Vine has already built a reputation for its production expertise and we want to grow this area of the business.

„We're winning new business by offering the same award-winning production values to poker as we do to any major sport – cricket, football or horse-racing.“

Presentable, run by husband and wife team Chris and Megan Stuart, is behind the 888.com Poker Nations Cup on Channel 4 and The William Hill Poker Grand Prix on Sky Sports.

Sunset+Vine will produce coverage of test match cricket and one-day international highlights for the next four years for Five.

Its presentation of the sport for Channel 4 was credited with changing the face of cricket on television and has won more than 20 awards.

It will now produce a 45-minute highlights programme in peak-time after every day's play at 7.15pm.

As part of the deal Five will use the Hawk-Eye graphics and statistics technology, which is owned by Tinopolis.