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Home shopping en español

Viva backed by private investors

By Doreen Hemlock
South Florida Sun-Sentinel
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A new home-shopping channel aims to launch from South Florida targeting U.S. Hispanics -- en español.

Delaware-based start-up Home Shopping Latino Inc. said it is talking with France Telecom's veteran broadcast center Globecast in Miami to handle its new Viva Telecompras, or Viva Home Shopping channel. The start-up expects to sell stock soon and launch the Spanish-language cable TV channel early next year, a top executive said Tuesday.

The move comes amid a boom in marketing to U.S. Hispanics, now the nation's largest minority group with annual spending estimated to top \$700 billion a year. Marketers are targeting the 45 million-plus U.S. Latinos, both in English and Spanish.

Home Shopping Latino is the brainchild of Frank Celecia, the company's chief executive who has worked in Hollywood production and marketing. Its backers so far are largely private investors from the United States, Mexico, Brazil and Belgium -- not big Spanish- or English-language media groups, said Greg Martin, vice president for investor relations.

The channel plans to launch in early 2007, initially with programming for less than 24 hours a day and later, round-the-clock.

But don't expect the new channel to look like English-language counterparts that also offer jewelry and computers for shoppers at home.

Martin said organizers plan presenters known in the Latino entertainment world, including some stars from telenovelas or TV soap operas.

Still, there will be competition to reach the U.S. Hispanic buyer, media specialists said.

Cable TV packages geared to Latinos already include English-language shopping channels, which offer customer service in Spanish. And broadcasters also offer infomercials in Spanish, said Philip Remek, a senior equity analyst at Guzman & Co. in Miami.

Besides, Spanish may not be the best way to reach Latinos. Many speak English, Remek said, and those who don't likely have lower buying power.

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