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Comcast's NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises has created a new production unit, Telemundo International Studios.

NBCUniversal's Telemundo is already the No. 1 Spanish-language content producer in the U.S., and Telemundo International is the second-biggest production, financing, and sales company of content in the Spanish-speaking world, trailing only Televisa.

But as an increasing number of consumers in Latin America, Spain, and the rest of the world watch content online, the creation of Telemundo International Studios marks a move by one of the biggest Latino players to meet the growing demand in international markets and from emerging platforms for high-end short-format scripted series.

"In a first phase," series will not run to more than 10-15 episodes, in line with U.S. series, said Marcos Santana, president of Telemundo International, who will lead the new business unit.

Each "high-high quality" series will topline award-winning crossover Hispanic talent who work or have worked in Hollywood, he added, saying that Telemundo International Studios is looking to work with directors and top production companies, including those in the film sector, in Spain and throughout Latin America -- in Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia - in order to produce the series.

Also headed by Santana, Telemundo International will handle the world sales on productions from TIS, which will be based out of Miami.

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"Telemundo International Studios will tap into an international growth opportunity at a time when Telemundo has established itself as the No. 1 Spanish-language broadcast network in prime time in the U.S.," said Cesar Conde, chairman of NBCUniversal International Group and NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises.

TIS marks a second production innovation after Telemundo launched its "Super Series" reset of traditional telenovelas, reducing its duration to 60-80 episodes and designing them to be renewable over multiple seasons.

The fourth season of Telemundo's flagship Super Series, "El Señor de los Cielos" (Lord of the Skies), bowed to 2.8 million total viewers, a Telemundo ratings record.

Now TIS will "capitalize on Telemundo's extensive experience and content production know-how, some of the most exciting and innovative Spanish-language short-format content in the world," said a press statement.

The launch comes as online platforms represent the fastest-growing acquisition and production TV type for TV drama. In the U.S. alone, their number of scripted series has skyrocketed from 13 in 2013 to 57 series to date this year, according to a new IHS Technology report, World TV Production Report 2016. Growth of demand, production and acquisition for online original scripted series in less mature markets such as Latin America may be even more dramatic in upcoming years. Much of the key talent for the first season of "Narcos," one of Netflix most successful series around the globe, was Latin American, including its Brazilian directors Jose Padilha and Fernando Coimbra and lead Mauro Wagner, who plays Pablo Escobar.

That said, Telemundo International Studios aims to deliver series which can travel across all platforms, including broadcast, cable and digital media, its press statement said.

Series will primarily be in Spanish. "If the story takes place in the U.S., characters could have a conversation in English; if in Italy, there will be people who speak in Italian," according to Santana. – *Variety*



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