



Smithsonian Networks' *Titanic: Case Closed* is among the programming marking the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the famous ship

Wills' viewpoint is echoed by David Royle, exec VP of programming and production for U.S. broadcaster Smithsonian Networks. "Audiences have become more demanding, and it's necessary to tell a truly compelling story that is visually strong, and full of real drama," Royle says. "It's also important to utilize CGI and other innovative ways to add a new perspective."

While Royle says "it's hard to argue with the ratings success of shows such as *Pawn Stars* and *Deadliest Catch*," he adds that by integrating these new perspectives into a documentary approach, Smithsonian's aim is to "make ourselves a destination of choice for history fans."

The use of CGI Royle talks about will be particularly apparent in April, when the network marks the 100th anniversary of the Titanic's sinking with *Titanic: Case Closed*, a 90-minute special from Bedlam Productions – the company behind Oscar-winning drama *The King's Speech* – and Airborne TV & Film.

The doc was jointly commissioned with National Geographic International Channels and promises to explore the real reasons behind the famous ship's catastrophic collapse.

Among the other notable dates on the network's calendar, "we'll be marking the anniversary of [Osama] Bin Laden's death in May," says Royle. "Also, we wouldn't be the Smithsonian if we failed to pay tribute to the Space Shuttle by marking the one-year anniversary of its last flight and its arrival at the National Air & Space Museum in April."

Royle calls the Darlow Smithson-produced *Space Shuttle: Final Countdown* "a fascinating film that merges aviation history and science."

As for the Titanic, look for many other networks around the world to mark the 100th anniversary of its sinking. Wills says UKTV will mark the centenary in April "with a couple of shows," as will French public broadcaster France Télévisions.

Laurent Flahault, France Télévisions' commissioning editor for acquisitions

and international coproductions, says that the French network is currently on the hunt for "big programming specials on commemorations and turning points," citing a biographical special that aired last year on Muammar Gaddafi as one of the network's top historical draws.

Programming should be "popular, very visual, comprehensive, revelatory and entertaining," with producers advised to "focus on commemorations" while adopting a "very accessible approach explaining the historical context and showing what the implications are today," he adds, warning that titles should not be "too narrow or too male-targeted."

For France 5, over the last year the channel has been using a Sunday slot to air programming focused on big events and turning points of the 20th century. Among the best performing titles, says Flahault, have been A+E Networks productions *America: the Story of Us* and *102 Minutes that Changed America*; the Nat Geo coproduction *The Egyptian Job*; and