

GMM rethinks Spring News acquisition

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GMM Grammy, the country's leading entertainment content producer, has reconsidered its offer to acquire the news station Spring News because some of the station's employees left recently.

"I'm still interested in acquiring Spring News, as it will add to our content. We really need the news content for digital TV," said Paiboon Damrongchaitham, chairman of Grammy.

However, Spring News recently lost several of its senior editors and reporters to other TV stations.

Mr Paiboon said skilled broadcast news personnel are in high demand, and with the defection in the Spring News newsroom, he believes its value has dipped.

Grammy is aggressively expanding its content as its satellite unit — GMM Z — will join the bidding for three channels on digital TV platforms, including a children's channel, a news channel and a variety channel in high-definition (HD) quality.

An auction organised by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) for 24 commercial digital TV channels is scheduled for sometime from August to October, and Grammy has no time to set up a novel news station.

News is not the entertainment company's forte. Grammy's initial plan was to acquire a major stake in Spring Cor-



A screenshot of Spring News' website taken last week. A mass exodus from the Spring newsroom has Grammy mulling its offer.

poration, the operator of Spring News, to include its news content by the time of the auction.

Negotiations are still under way, and Mr Paiboon admitted it is a tough task for GMM to build a news station with scant experience in so little time.

Thairath TV channel, operated by VG3 Co, a media unit of the country's largest circulation newspaper, has aggressively expanded its broadcasting business as the channel aims to start broadcasting in the third quarter this year on satellite TV, while plans are also under way for it to join the digital TV auction.

Neilsen (Thailand) reported news programmes represented 30% of TV's 21 billion baht in ad spending last year.

Of NBTC's 24 commercial digital channels, five are children's channels,

five are news, 10 are variety channels with standard definition and four are variety channels in HD.

Current interest in the news slots exceeds the five available channels with MCOT, Channel 3 of BEC World, Voice TV owned by the Shinawatra family, Spring News, Thairath TV, Nation Channel, Grammy and TNN news by TrueVisions all keen to bid.

Thawatchai Jittrapanun, a member of NBTC's broadcasting committee, said the auction starting price depends on the content categories. Content for HD channels will have the highest minimum bid, followed by variety channels with SD quality, news channels and finally children's channels.

He expects the starting prices will be finalised this week.