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Even off air, Venezuela's RCTV goes on

BY DANIEL SHOER-ROTH AND CASTO OCANDO

The government of President Hugo Chávez may have yanked Radio Caracas Televisión off the air, but it has not been able to silence it.

RCTV, which officially folded on May 27 after the government turned over its license to a state-funded public channel, has not stopped producing telenovelas, comedies and newscasts and is slipping its signal through creative means -- in Caracas and in Miami.

The oldest TV channel in Venezuela is using the Internet, projections in public squares and housing complexes in Caracas and arrangements with former competitors to continue broadcasting.

In Miami, the Telefutera and Galavisión networks, both owned by Univisión Communications, have continued to telecast two RCTV telenovelas and one serial, while TV Venezuela, a satellite channel based in Key Biscayne with nationwide coverage through DirecTV, is adding more content produced by RCTV.

RCTV International, which operates from northwest Miami, has not stopped selling and distributing telenovelas in more than 40 countries, the company management said.

REBROADCASTS

Last week, RCTV signed an accord with Caracol Televisión of Colombia to rebroadcast part of its programming through Caracol's Latin American network.

In Venezuela, the news channel Globovisión gave RCTV several time slots to broadcast its main newscast, El Observador -- The Observer -- and its most popular sitcom, Radio Rochela.

El Observador also has been broadcasting on Youtube.com.

"Everybody at RCTV is giving out his best, and every time we find an opportunity to take that work to the public, we do it," Marcel Granier, RCTV's president, told El Nuevo Herald in a phone interview from Bogotá, where he was conducting negotiations with Colombian companies.

Granier stressed that his

priority nevertheless is to return to the air in Venezuela. In the meantime, he said, he is using alternative conduits to satisfy the growing need of audiences both in Venezuela and abroad.

"We have received much support from many colleagues who are helping us to maintain contact with our public," he said.

RCTV's Internet page, www.rctv.net, received such a flood of visits during the week following the shutdown that the servers almost crashed, said Beatriz Pérez Ayala, RCTV's vice president for corporate communications.

According to RCTV statistics the page received more than 2 million hits in the last three weeks, a historic

record.

`GOOD RESULTS'

RCTV's international strategy "has brought good results, because the whole world has turned its eyes to Venezuela," said Alberto Federico Ravell, executive director of Globovisión, the last opposition broadcaster in Venezuela after RCTV's closure.

Ravell last week authorized the launching of a daily segment of El Observador through Globovisión, a former competitor of RCTV. Beginning on Monday, Globovisión will also broadcast Radio Rochela, one of RCTV's top programs.

Chávez said he was considering suspending Globovisión's broadcasting license as well, shortly after he announced he would not renew RCTV's, accusing both channels of backing a 2002 coup against him and violating various broadcast laws.

If Globovisión is taken off the air, Ravell said, it will follow RCTV's example.

"We shall continue to broadcast by any means possible, from a loudspeaker to a street-corner refreshment stand."

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