BILL ROEDY: BERLIN WALL
In January 1989 (my first month as chief executive of MTV Europe) we bought a transponder on Astra 1A a KU satellites which enables receipt of TV signals with a 60 cm dish instead of the 1.5 metre. This was a dramatic evolution in distribution technology. Suddenly homes could receive television channels Direct to home. Receivers or ‘dishes’ popped up everywhere in Europe, especially behind the Iron Curtain where before there was limited TV choice available.

I also decided to keep the signal unencrypted enabling everyone to see MTV without a decoder box. We additionally distributed MTV on every cable system that we could find in East Europe thus building a substantial audience behind the Iron Curtain.

This culminated in East Berlin during the first week on November 1989. I was there to give an East meets West speech. As part of my participation, we received permission to connect MTV to the conference hotels in the East. After weeks of coordination, we finally connected MTV. On that night, November 7th we went to a politburo reception to be hosted by Egon Krenz, who just succeeded Erich Honeker as president.

No one showed up and the journalist said it was because we just connected MTV!

I have brought an MTV camera crew with me to East Berlin which proved to be very useful.

Public demonstrations and rallies lead to November 9th, when the wall came down. Excitement was everywhere, you could feel it in the air, even some of the East German guards were smiling. My camera crew recorded everything and many in the West came to the wall after seeing the events unfold on MTV.

Of course. MTV did not bring the wall down. But technology - not unlike twitter and Facebook during Arab spring - was a contributing force to the peaceful changes. The spirit of the people along with the borders of Hungary relaxing, the Pope’s visits to Poland, and most importantly the reforms and directions from Mr. Gorbachev (especially not to open fire) all played major roles in the peaceful breaking down of the barrier, uniting Germany and all of Europe.

After the night of November 9th, things happen very quickly to open at the two sides. One year later Germany was formally united.

My background also brought personal lessons. During the Cold War I commanded three nuclear missile bases in Europe as part of NATO. For me, music and media became more powerful than missiles. I saw the Iron Curtain turn into the Red Carpet. Music was seen to be more powerful than missiles.

MTV returned to East Berlin in November 1994 to stage our first ever Europe Music Awards. We constructed at the time the largest outdoor tent, facing the Brandenburg Gate from the East with George Michael singing ‘Freedom’ as the curtains were raised showing the Brandenburg Gate, the symbol of unity.

We brought back the Europe Music Awards in 2009, the 20th Anniversary, once again on Pariser Platz, facing the Brandenburg Gate.

U2 sang ‘One’, as laser lit symbols of peace and unity projected on the Brandenburg Gate. It was magical.

MTV has a deep and personal connection with Berlin, first by our connection with “Breaking down barriers” and secondly by standing for unity.

On the personal side, I gave out pieces of the wall to my employees as a symbol of breaking down barriers, which we were also attempting to do with our business. I also purchased an original 2-ton section of wall as part of the living Museum of peaceful unity at an event presented the “Free Your Mind” Award to President Gorbachev.

In 2011 I travelled to Fulton, Missouri, to give the same speech which Winston Churchill delivered on March 5, 1946 at Westminster College.

By coining the phrase Iron Curtain, Churchill effectively defined the next 45 years of Cold War. I subsequently purchased his “Wilderness Years” Apartment where he wrote his lone voice speeches against Hitler and Nazism. At Westminster, after the War, he once again proved to be the lone voice.