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ENGLISH TV BELIEVES CRIME DOES NOT PAY

No takers for English version of French-language crime channel

BY TOM BLACKWELL

When burglars broke into Vince Géracitano's Montreal business, then made two repeat visits, he figured the footage from his security camera would help police nab the brazen thieves.

But without any way to publicize the pictures, they ended up being all but useless.

So Mr. Géracitano came up with a novel idea: a TV channel that would air police bulletins containing such images 24 hours a day, featuring crimes both major and minor, as well as missing persons reports.

His 15-month-old French-language digital channel, Avis de Recherche, has since helped solve several cases in Quebec, including a \$175,000 bank fraud, and has been used to look for missing children and even track escaped inmates.

But when Mr. Géracitano tried to establish a similar station for English Canada, he hit a brick wall. Though cities such as Toronto and Vancouver have been grappling with worrying crime waves, cable and satellite companies have refused to take on the channel, he said.

The Quebec station, available since October, 2004, is part of the basic bundle on Videotron's digital service. Toronto-based firms such as Rogers and Bell ExpressVu told him they saw no



business case for the service, the entrepreneur said.

"Here we have a channel that ... helps our community, helps our police forces. And by helping our police, we are helping ourselves," Mr. Géracitano said. "Out of the hundreds of channels that are out there being broadcast, I think there should be room for one such as this."

With the CRTC licence for an English-language version of the station expiring this September, time is running out for Mr. Géracitano, who has already mortgaged his and his parents' homes to finance the project.

Nancy Cottenden, a Rogers spokeswoman, noted that customers who have a digital box would have to subscribe specifically to the channel, to be called All-points Bulletin in English.

"Programmers, they all want to be carried by Rogers. But we want to make sure that when we make these decisions, there is consumer demand. And, frankly, would a customer be willing to pay for this service?" she said. "We sat back and realized there just wasn't the consumer demand."

Paolo Pasquini, a Bell spokesman, said he could not comment on why the channel was rejected but did say that "we are always working to deliver customers the content they want."

Mr. Géracitano says there are

thousands of crimes committed in his city that will never make it into the mainstream media.

On Avis de Recherche, even relatively minor crimes are featured. It has been "enormously" helpful to police, said Detective-Lieutenant Viateur D'Astou of Info Crime, Montreal's Crime Stoppers.

Tips from the channel's viewers have led to the arrests of 12 alleged criminals and prompted others to persuade family members to turn themselves in, he said.

The most prominent break came in a fraudulent cheque scam that had bilked the TD Bank of \$175,000. The surveillance-camera picture of one suspect was shown on Avis de Recherche and a viewer identified her, leading to charges and the recovery of thousands of dollars, Det-Lt D'Astou said.

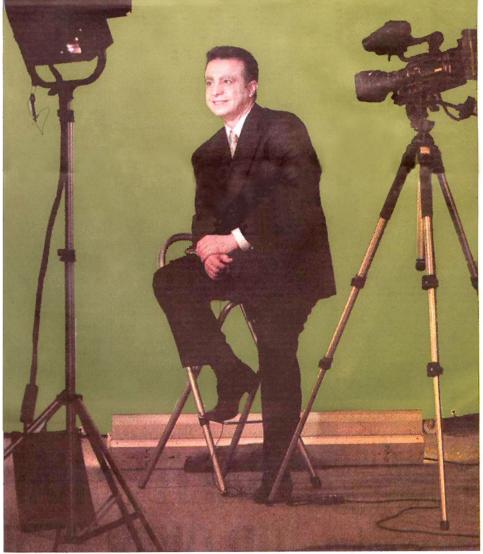
"I don't quite understand," he said of the lack of interest in such a channel outside Quebec. "We have a channel like this that helps the police, and I think we should have something similar in English as well. There should be the best service for the citizens in both languages."

The Correctional Service of Canada has also started using the channel, supplying photographs of escaped inmates.

And it has brought many helpful leads to the Missing Children's Network, said Pina Arcamone of the Quebec organization. Publicizing pictures has a proven record in helping find children, she said.

"The more tools we have, the wider the audience," Ms. Arcamone said of Avis de Recherche. National Post, with a file from

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Vince Géracitano says his 24-hour channel, above left, which airs police bulletins and surveillance videos of suspected criminals, provides a valuable service to the police and the communities they patrol.