

YouTube launching food channel with TV veterans

J.M. HIRSCH - AP Food Editor - Associated Press

Bruce Seidel is confident the future of food television won't be seen on television.

Which is why the Food Network and Cooking Channel veteran has checked out of network TV to oversee the launch of YouTube's latest original content channel, HUNGRY. The channel, which goes live on July 2, is expected to feature a freewheeling blend of how-to and celebrity-driven food videos.

The venture is part of the Google Inc.-owned video site's plan to launch roughly 100 channels of niche-oriented programming. Earlier this month, YouTube pledged to spend some \$200 million to help market those channels across Google and its advertising network.

Seidel was drawn to the project in part for YouTube's ability to create a more direct community with viewers than generally is possible with network television. It also offered more flexibility not just for viewers, but also for producers, who can more easily experiment with format and content.

YouTube also offers an enviably large and young demographic, truly the icing on advertisers' cake.

"The wonderful thing about YouTube is it has 800 million users worldwide and they all need to eat," Seidel said in a telephone interview. "I'd like to get just 1 percent of them."

YouTube content historically has been dominated by low- and no-budget user generated videos. But Seidel, a former top executive at Food Network who oversaw the launch of its sister network, Cooking Channel, said HUNGRY will feature professionally produced videos worthy of any network.

At launch, videos will stick mostly with YouTube convention, running one to three minutes, with new episodes posted weekly. Seidel said they also are eager to explore longer format videos. By the end of the summer, the channel hopes to have close to a dozen series, all produced in partnership with multimedia studio Electus, which is responsible for the channel's content.

One of the series will feature fellow Food Network alumnus Duff Goldman, the cake master behind that channel's reality show "Ace of Cakes." Goldman's YouTube program, "Duff's Food World," will be a sometimes irreverent variety show focused on food pop culture, including visits to unusual restaurants and spotlights of humorous food clips from the web and TV.

Goldman also will serve as a talent and programming consultant for HUNGRY. In that role, he said he is eager to push food television both forward and backward.

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"Basically, the cooking show on television is almost dead," he said. "When you look at the programming on any kind of cable food channel, you kind of find that everything is being replaced by travelogues, competition, reality. There is not a lot of instruction."

YouTube's ability to promote a simple two-minute video on how to roast a chicken — something simply not done on network television — is just as alluring as creating content that pushes boundaries, Goldman said.

"It's magic. It doesn't have any boundaries. I don't need to make it 22 minutes. I don't need to make any sponsors happy. I can get away with stuff," he said.

Other series already in production include "Brothers Green," which features a pair of Brooklyn brothers who are musicians and "underground caterers" tackling new culinary challenges every week, and "Casserole Queens," which focuses on two Austin women who favor retro food and entertaining.

Flexing its ability to focus on micro-niches, HUNGRY also plans series on pork, gluten-free cooking and Italian desserts.

The point is to simply try new things, Goldman said. If it works, it will continue. If it doesn't, it won't.

"Food is very precious. People get a little too serious about it," he said. "There's room for the very serious culinarians. But I also like to laugh at myself. So we're going to do a lot of comedy. Because there's a lot of comedy in food."

Earlier this month, YouTube announced the launch of several other channels, including Wigs, which will focus on scripted dramas for women; and TeamUSA, which will feature content ahead of the 2012 Olympic Games.

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