



MEDIA BIZ

With Paul R. La Monica

August 10, 2007

Old media targets the Facebook crowd

Social networking and user-generated content are all the rage in the media world. Google's (GOOG) YouTube, News Corp.'s (NWS) MySpace and privately held Facebook — the Big 3 of individual expression, if you will — are attracting a lot of attention with the younger generation, a demographic highly coveted by advertisers.

As such, many traditional media companies are also seeking to capture the Facebook crowd. But one such "old" media company hoping to make big a youth push that might surprise you is E.W. Scripps (SSP), the newspaper publisher that also owns cable channels Food Network, DIY and HGTV.

The company's HGTV.com Web site has launched a popular feature called [Rate My Space](#), which lets people upload photos of bathrooms, kitchens, yards and other "spaces" so that people can judge them and offer comments, tips and friendly advice. Charity Curley, the vice president of HGTV.com, said that the Rate My Space section of HGTV.com has 41,000 registered users and has generated 44 million page views since the end of February.

But for the most part, HGTV has catered mainly to an older audience. Now, HGTV is going after the kids as well. The company has quietly launched a [Rate My Dorm Room](#) feature on the site in order to attract the people that are most familiar with the concept of social networking and user-generated content.

"When you think of today's HGTV brand, it appeals to a certain demographic that is older and suburban," said David Bankston, chief technology officer with [Neighborhood America](#), a privately held tech firm that helps businesses, including media companies, as well as government agencies incorporate social networking and community features on their Web sites. Neighborhood America worked with Scripps on the Rate My Space and Rate my Dorm Room features.

"Rate My Space is now a targeted focus of Scripps for not just people 40 and up looking for bedroom and bathroom tips. They are now focusing on a much younger demographic in order to get page views they never would have seen," Bankston said.

Curley agreed that HGTV wants to attract an audience that might not necessarily watch the cable channel.

"College kids' parents are who we typically appeal to. We're trying to introduce the brand to people that are younger," she said.

So will Rate My Dorm Room be a hit with college kids used to checking out Facebook instead of HGTV.com? That remains to be seen.

Curley said HGTV will promote the site more aggressively in the coming weeks and months as students head back to school. She said HGTV hasn't ruled out advertising on the more popular social networking sites but that the company will probably spend most of its marketing effort on the real world, i.e. grassroots campaigns at the campuses of big colleges and universities.

But if nothing else, Scripps definitely deserves a lot of credit for embracing social networking. In addition to the Neighborhood America-powered features on HGTV.com, Scripps has also made several acquisitions of social media companies as of late.

This past week, the company announced it was buying Incando Corporation, which owns the photo and video sharing site Pickle.com. And last month, Scripps agreed to buy Recipezaar, a user-generated site that features more than 230,000 recipes.

Still, like other "old" media companies, Scripps still has a lot to prove to Wall Street. Shares are down nearly 20 percent so far this year. It doesn't help matters that the company has exposure to the slow-growth newspaper business.

But Scripps can't be accused of "not getting" the Internet. Sooner or later, the company's online investments, especially its aggressive courting of a younger, hipper audience, should pay off.