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## HGTV Gets Social Network

### ***Scripps Networks snubs video-hosting deals with YouTube and MySpace to build its own online community.***

February 19, 2007

By **Laurie Sullivan**

Scripps Networks plans to roll out a social network for its home and garden cable channel HGTV on Monday.

The move pulls in digital photos, news, and reviews from the web site into traditional TV broadcasts such as the channel's *Design on a Dime* series.

Rate My Room, the new HGTV online community, lets the TV audience connect online and discuss remodeling, budgets, and future projects. Viewers can write ratings and reviews, post to various forums, and upload photos of their living rooms, bathrooms, or other rooms that either were recently designed or need remodeling.

'Traditional media companies are taking the Internet more seriously.'  
-Rachel Happe,  
IDC

Local television networks have long been at the heart of community life, but traditional broadcast and cable companies now recognize the need to foster community in new ways through web sites. Social networks are known to promote loyalty among viewers and faster growth for shows by attracting high-paying advertisers.

But rather than turn to Google's YouTube or News Corp.'s MySpace to host the content, traditional broadcast companies have begun to either build web sites to distribute content on their own, or contract with Internet TV services, such as Naples, Florida-based Neighborhood America or Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Brightcove, to build the sites for them.

As part of a shift to retain control of content distribution and build advertising dollars, big media companies are seeking ways to market and keep people on their own web sites, according to Rachel Happe, research manager for the digital business economy at IDC.

"The technology wasn't available until recently, so in the early days it was a bit overwhelming for the media companies to build computer- and Internet-based infrastructures to offer the site themselves," she said. "Traditional media companies are taking the Internet more seriously and investing more in technology to keep control of their content to guard against piracy."

Ms. Happe points to the recent Viacom cease-and-desist order issued to YouTube as part of the trend toward taking back brand and content ownership online (see [Google Seeks Copyright Council](#)).

#### **Creating Additional Challenges**

Still, experts believe the decision by media companies to build their own social networks could foster a slew of new challenges for them, from monitoring piracy to controlling pornography on their sites.

As with YouTube and MySpace, the need to add controls that can monitor copyrighted materials and pornographic content uploaded to a site becomes a critical function as more traditional TV broadcasters such as Scripps Networks jump into the online world.

There are other problems too. "Not many people know how to find the content on these media sites because they don't have an online audience like YouTube," said Charlene Li, an analyst at Forrester Research. "The interesting thing about the Scripps site is there's an existing audience with a focus and expertise on home improvements."

In time, viewers will have an option to upload videos to the social network from a PC or mobile phone camera. Other features being considered are sharing content with other sites; sections for blogs, journals, and wikis;

and channels that focus on niches, such as rose gardens, kitchen cabinetry, or window coverings.

The HGTV web site, which is hosted by Neighborhood America, can support 100 people uploading photos simultaneously, said Jim Sexton, vice president of interactive brands at Scripps Networks. From that content, the show's editors will comb the site looking for rooms and projects to discuss and feature on the air.

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