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INTERNET

SOCIAL NETWORKING

A New Way to Surf

Broadcasters try more interactive TV.

If you're into home renovation shows, you don't have to just sit and watch TV decorators redo other people's homes. Upload pictures of your own home and let the TV audience help you out. That's the idea behind Scripps Network's new online social network for its home and garden cable channel HGTV.

Rate My Room, the new HGTV online community that launched last week, is an early example of the new trend of TV networks building their own online communities, allowing them to snub video giants YouTube and MySpace in the process. RateMyRoom lets the TV audience connect online and discuss remodeling, budgets, and future

projects. Network editors will have the option to pull digital photos, news, and reviews from the web site into traditional TV broadcasts such as the channel's *Design on a Dime* series.

Technology from Internet TV service companies like Naples, Florida-based Neighborhood America and Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Brightcove, which distribute and host content, makes it possible for broadcasters like Knoxville, Tennessee-based Scripps to build social networks that let viewers upload photos and videos and post comments.

The shift gives media companies control over content distribution as they seek to promote view-



Dig my crib? Rate My Room lets viewers discuss their own home projects.

er loyalty, curb piracy, and attract high-paying advertisers to their sites. Tensions over unauthorized posting of TV shows on YouTube and other sites, has also led networks to create their own sites to host viewer-generated content.

The long-term effects for YouTube and MySpace could be devastating if they "can't monitor piracy more closely and let go of trying to control pricing and brands," says Rachel Happe, research manager for digital business at IDC. "In the long term, both could have a tough time convincing large media companies to stick around."

CBS developed a site at CBSNews.com and started integrating Internet news into their broad-

cast last September. One day, CBS could have a section on the site for viewer-generated videos, says Mike Sims, director of news and operations at CBSNews.com. "We want to give viewers the tools not only to read and watch the news, but interact with other members of the audience," he says.

Still, Forrester Research analyst Charlene Li isn't convinced TV networks can successfully lure established audiences and advertisers from YouTube and MySpace. "The problem is the networks don't have the online audience similar to YouTube, and many people have trouble finding the content on these media sites," she says.

—Laurie Sullivan