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## The Reality Behind HGTV's New Reality Show

With the decline in the numbers of television viewers in recent years, networks are in search of a sure-fire way to guarantee an audience for advertisers.

They should look no further than Scripps Networks, which on June 19 debuted a TV show created in a most unconventional way. HGTV (Home & Garden TV), owned by Scripps, unveiled "Rate My Space," a show spawned from the community website of the same name.

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Launched in February 2007, the site, also powered by HGTV, invites users to post photos of their favorite spaces, ranging from bedrooms and bathrooms to pools and dorm rooms. Users rate each space on a scale from 1 to 5 and post decorating advice and colorful comments about each one. (One recent user posted, "Does Imelda Marcos live here?" about a photo of someone's closet filled with hundreds of shoes.)

When HGTV started the site, the executives never thought of it as an audience research tool, but that's exactly what it's become. "The original goal was more to do with knowing that our audience is talented and we wanted them to show off," says Freddy James, vice president and site director for HGTV.com. "It's like a one-two punch to migrate over to TV."

Because of the site's amazing success and continuous user activity (as of May, the site boasted 150 million page views, 105,000 registered users, and 32,000 spaces), the network saw an opportunity to close the gap between multiple platforms and bring the concept to a wider audience. Advertisers benefit by having targeted demographics, and an engaged audience prior to the show even launching. And HGTV is ultimately giving its viewers the programming they want.

"[HGTV] clearly saw that because of the amazing success and continued activity, they want those eyeballs on the network. And then they want the network to continue to drive the eyeballs back to the site," says David Bankston, executive vice president and chief technology officer at Neighborhood America, the technology provider that powers Ratemyspace.hgtv.com.

Seeing the rich potential of integrating social media and television, James is constantly conceptualizing new ideas, such as driving people back to the site by announcing "winners" from the show there, launching new categories like "rate this landscape," and launching additional online communities. One community that James is in the process of evolving is BeonHGTV.com, which searches for home sellers who will agree to invite the HGTV realty team to their homes to estimate the worth of their homes before they decide to put them on the market. James plans to grow the site so users can upload images of their houses and get advice from other homeowners. And the network could ultimately spin that into a television series.

"It's almost a 360-degree view and beyond," he says. "The way the Web element is set up is it drives users to the television and the concept is that it drives them back to the site. You get caught in this cyclical motion of design. It's the perfect platform."

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