

Video site creates 'shows' of user content

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As online video sites have exploded in popularity, many have been left wondering if a successful business model will emerge. Pay-for-content and putting commercials in the videos have both been oft-tried and oft-failed models.

GoFish.com believes they've found a solution: advertiser-sponsored "shows" of user content. The site plans the launch of this user sponsorship in late July.

The origins of the sponsorship concept go back to February after site managers reached several conclusions from user surveys, said Michael Downing, GoFish's chief executive officer.

First, fame potential is a motivating factor in making content.

"A lot of people felt like submitting videos was their opportunity to get discovered," Downing said. "It's their chance to show the world how good they are at making videos or how talented they are."

Second, technology is developed enough that users can make sophisticated videos quickly.

Third, users were making videos to respond to other videos, one-up other users, or compete in various ways.

These three conclusions together, Downing said, led to GoFish's idea to create reality shows centered on user content.

"The interactive reality platform is nothing more than a rich technology bundle of features and functions on top of what we're already doing," he said. "America's Dream Date is the first show concept that made the cut."

America's Dream Date, as the name implies, is a dating-based reality show. Contestants join by creating personal videos, and users rate the videos.

The winning couple will get sent on a date to Paris, with the second- and third-place couples getting a vacation to Las Vegas.

As a test run of the new business model, Dream Date will be sponsored by energy drink Jetset.

"Our companies target the same consumers, the young, hip 'iPod generation' who are participating in the user-generated content revolution," Jeff Silver, CEO of Jetset Beverage Inc., said in a news release. "We think our involvement in Dream Date will afford us a great way to reach this market."

Downing said that Dream Date not only brings in sponsorship revenue immediately but increases GoFish's overall profile.

"We can create a virtual business model around these shows," he said. "Simultaneously we're creating a long-term branded asset."

He said that Dream Date is the basic formula GoFish will try to follow in creating future shows like it.

"We want to create a show concept where everyone can participate," he said. "We want to create a show concept where the resulting content is entertaining. And we want to create a show concept where brands will

want to put their name behind it."

Downing said that while putting together Dream Date, he talked with many people in standard broadcast television and found that a convergence between user-created video sites and broadcast shows might be the next big thing.

"The platform is potentially viable to folks who have existing shows," he said. "Once a week, there could be a broadcast TV show where a host walks you through this week in America's Dream Date. It's taking the American Idol phenomenon and really putting it on steroids."

If Dream Date is successful, Downing said, the impact will be seen throughout the Internet.

"Clearly, everybody is scratching their head as to how you channel this into a successful business model," he said. "In the very near term, it's an important step in the online world."

He said that as concerned as video Web sites are about business models, broadcast networks are even more worried about just keeping their audience.

"They're working on how does (online video) impact traditional broadcast TV today?" he said. "There's a whole generation of kids watching more video online than on TV."

Downing said he believes the online video movement is not unlike the digital music revolution of the last decade.

"It was all about people taking control of their music experience," he said. "It's the same desire for control and freedom to determine how to watch video that's driving this movement now. The technology is

allowing people to do this stuff for the first time."

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