

A year on, YouTube's channels not yet must-see TV

November 12 2012, by Jake Coyle



In this Thursday, March 15, 2012 photo provided by Red Bull Stratos, Felix Baumgartner prepares to jump during the first manned test flight for Red Bull Stratos over Roswell, N.M. Some 52 million watched YouTube's live stream of daredevil Baumgartner's free-fall jump from space, a viewership that far outpaced the 7.6 million who watched it on the Discovery Channel in the U.S. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Jay Nemeth)

(AP)—When Google announced plans to fund some 100 new channels of original programming on YouTube, many expected a transformation in television.

But a year later, the revolution has not yet been YouTubed.

[Google](#) had disrupted other industries, and TV appeared to be next in line. Just as a handful of networks begat a few hundred [cable channels](#), [YouTube](#) would now foster the birth of thousands of channels online.

Since it was founded in 2005, YouTube has been predominately the home of user-created video, and 72 hours of video are uploaded every minute. But the site is trying to lure viewers to stay longer and coax advertisers to pair their brands with known talent.

YouTube is now doubling down on its investment. It recently expanded into Europe with another 50-plus channels. And it is reinvesting in 40 percent of the channels that have already launched. That means more than half of the channels have failed to catch on, yet it's still a rate of success that any network programmer would kill for.

"What we're trying to do is galvanize the creative and [advertising](#) community," Robert Kyncl, YouTube's global head of content and the leader of its channels initiative, said in an interview. "And we're succeeding at that."



In this Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012 image provided by Red Bull Stratos, pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria jumps out of his capsule during the final manned flight for Red Bull Stratos. Some 52 million watched YouTube's live stream of

daredevil Baumgartner's free-fall jump from space, a viewership that far outpaced the 7.6 million who watched it on the Discovery Channel in the U.S. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, file)

YouTube has declined to make public the size of its investment. The initial channel launch was reportedly fueled by \$100 million, a number YouTube executives dispute. Kyncl will go no further than to confirm the \$200 million he pledged to spend marketing the channels at YouTube's TV-style upfront presentation to advertisers in May—a flashy event capped by a performance by Jay-Z, who recently launched a lifestyle channel called Life and Times.

Jamie Byrne, director of content strategy, said the second round of funding would be relatively similar to the amount of the first round, on a per channel basis. Those not being offered more money aren't canceled; they are encouraged to keep going but will have to pay their own way.

The fabric of the site has been reoriented to emphasize a user's playlist of channels, a move that has increased channel subscribers by 50 percent, executives say.

Forrester analyst James McQuivey, who specializes in digital video and was among those who predicted YouTube's channels would be a landmark shift, has not seen the progress he expected. He would like to see YouTube try to produce some mainstream originals, as Netflix and Hulu have, in order to attract mass audiences, not just niche ones.

"They haven't really changed the way people watch TV," McQuivey said. "That said, to have expected to do that in a year would have been kind of crazy.

Perhaps the closest a YouTube channel has come to a mainstream viewing event was Red Bull's October 14 webcast of daredevil Felix Baumgartner's free-fall jump from space. Some 52 million watched the channel's live stream, a viewership that far outpaced the 7.6 million who watched it on the Discovery Channel in the U.S.

Most programming has been more of the talk show variety. Rainn Wilson gets metaphysical on his [channel](#) "Soul Pancake." Amy Poehler gives young women a role model with "Smart Girls." Shaquille O'Neal flexes a new muscle with "Comedy Shaq."

The most popular few channels typically draw 5-10 million viewers weekly. Most channels, though, receive less than 100,000 views per week and some draw just a few thousand.

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