

Yahoo tunes into mobile video with new application

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Yahoo is auditioning for a bigger role on iPhones and iPads with the release of its first mobile application tailored for watching video on touch-control screens.

The app, called Yahoo Screen, is set up to make the experience of sifting through video on smartphones and [tablet computers](#) more like channel surfing on a television. Instead of relying on a TV remote control, users of the Yahoo Screen app unveiled Monday will use their fingers to flip through programs and sort through roughly 20 different channels separated into categories such as celebrities, sports, games and food.

The app is available only for Apple Inc.'s iPhone and iPad, but Yahoo Inc. intends to develop a version compatible with the much larger universe of devices powered by Google Inc.'s Android software.

Yahoo Screen is the latest offshoot of company CEO Marissa Mayer's crusade to make Yahoo's services part of their daily routines. Mayer has been emphasizing the need for better [mobile applications](#) and more compelling video since Yahoo lured her away from a top executive job at Google Inc. 14 months ago.

The new app was built in New York by an engineering team led by Robby Stein, whose expertise was imported last October when Yahoo bought his startup, Stamped, for an undisclosed amount. It marked the first of about 20 acquisitions that Mayer has made as Yahoo's CEO and reunited her with Stein, who had previously worked with at Google

before launching his startup.

"This gives us a great product in a key area of people's lives," Stein said of Yahoo Screen. "Watching video has become something people do almost as much as they check email and we think we have come up with something that is as intuitive to use as your TV."

To trumpet the arrival of its video app, Yahoo also is rolling out eight comedy series made exclusively for its website along with clips from more than 700 episodes of NBC's "Saturday Night Live" broadcast during the past 38 years. Yahoo announced its deals to show the "Saturday Night Live" highlights and the new comedy series in April. As part of a new deal with Viacom Inc. revealed Monday, Yahoo Screen also will show clips from "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," "The Colbert Report" and "MTV News."

Borrowing a concept popularized by Netflix Inc.'s Internet video subscription service, Yahoo is releasing all the episodes of the new comedy series at once so viewers can watch the installments in rapid succession if they want.

Netflix's decision to simultaneously release the episodes of exclusive series as "House of Cards" and "Orange Is The New Black" has proven so popular that it has intensified a phenomenon known as binge viewing.

Unlike Netflix, Yahoo doesn't charge money to watch its videos. Yahoo instead hopes to make money by selling more digital advertising, although the Sunnyvale, California, company isn't interjecting commercials into its mobile video app right away. Ads will be shown when videos are watched through a Web browser.

Boosting ad revenue has proven to be a challenge for Yahoo in recent years, even as the company has been making strides in other areas under

Mayer's leadership. For instance, Yahoo's ad revenue after commissions declined by 4 percent from last year in the company's most recent quarter while net ad revenue at Google climbed by 14 percent.

Yahoo is trying to differentiate itself from the longer-running video stockpiled at Netflix and similar services by limiting each of the comedy episodes to three to 11 minutes. The time restriction reflects Yahoo's belief that people consume video in snack-sized servings on mobile devices and devour bigger helpings on TV's larger screens.

Google's YouTube video site has thrived by creating a massive library of mostly short clips primarily contributed by amateurs. YouTube is by far the Internet's most popular video outlet, with nearly 168 million U.S. viewers during the month of July, according to the latest measurements from research firm comScore. Videos shared on Facebook came in a distant second, with 61 million viewers in July, followed by AOL Inc.'s online services at 58 million. Yahoo ranked seventh on comScore's list of top video sites with 42 million U.S. viewers in July.

ComScore's numbers don't include videos watched on mobile devices through mobile applications.

Yahoo is betting its audience will expand as it adds more professional programming from long-established networks, such as NBC, ABC and CBS, as well as special projects made by stars looking to broaden their horizons beyond TV and movies. The new comedy series include contributions from John Stamos, best known for his role in the TV series, "Full House"; Ed Helms, part of the cast in the TV series, "The Office"; and Cheryl Hines, who played Larry David's wife in HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

Some of Yahoo's new material is edgy. Stamos' series revolves around him talking to guests such as his former "Full House" co-star Bob Saget

and actress Olivia Munn about how they lost their virginity. A segment of a series starring Hines revolves around her reluctance to be fitted with a hairpiece on her genitalia for an acting role.

"We think we are developing a truly new genre of video," said Erin McPherson, the head of Yahoo's video division. "I look at this as the first step to having the world-class experience that Yahoo has needed to compete in [video](#)."

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