

Xbox moves ahead with original programming plan

April 28 2014, by Derrik J. Lang



This photo provided by Microsoft shows a scene from the upcoming "Halo" video game for the Xbox One. After nearly two years since launching a studio to create new shows to be streamed on Xbox consoles, Microsoft is finally ready to serve an assorted helping of original programming this summer for the Xbox 360 and Xbox One. However, viewers shouldn't expect Xbox Originals, as they're called, to be available the same way that content is on Netflix and Hulu. (AP Photo/Microsoft)

When it comes to original programming, Microsoft is going to throw it at the Xbox and see what sticks.

After nearly two years since launching a studio to create new shows to be streamed on Xbox consoles, Microsoft is finally ready to serve an assorted helping of original programming this summer for the Xbox 360 and Xbox One. However, viewers shouldn't expect Xbox Originals, as they're called, to be available the same way that content is provided on Netflix and Hulu.

"We don't necessarily know what approach will work, and we don't necessarily know what approach won't work," noted Nancy Tellem, the president of Xbox Entertainment Studios during a recent press preview of Xbox Originals at Microsoft's offices in Santa Monica, California.

The event was organized by Microsoft ahead of the company's presentation Monday at the "newfronts" in New York—a digital take on the annual "upfronts," where broadcast and cable networks unveil their upcoming schedules for advertisers. Others set to participate in this week's "newfronts" include Hulu, Crackle, Maker, AOL and Yahoo!

Tellem, who previously was president of CBS Entertainment, said no decisions have been made as to how each Xbox [series](#) will be available—either as part of the \$5-a-month Xbox Live subscription, for sale individually or available for free through advertising partnerships. She said an Xbox Originals app would be added to the consoles' user interface, and each new Xbox series might be differently distributed.



This April 16, 2013 photo provided by Microsoft shows Nancy Tellem, director of Xbox programming, at Microsoft Studios in Redmond, Wash. Among the shows coming to Xbox this year are the street soccer docu-series "Every Street United," which will be first to debut in July 2014, and the six-part tech-centric documentary series "Signal to Noise." Tellem said an Xbox Originals app would be added to the consoles' user interface, and each new Xbox show might be distributed differently. (AP Photo/Microsoft, Stuart Isett)

Among the shows coming to Xbox this year are the street soccer docu-series "Every Street United," which will be the first to debut in July, and the six-part tech-centric documentary series "Signal to Noise." The first installment—"Atari: Game Over"—chronicles this past weekend's

excavation of a landfill thought to be filled with copies of Atari's infamous "E.T." game.

The studio previously announced it was working on a live-action series based on the "Halo" sci-fi video game, with filmmaker Steven Spielberg serving as an executive producer, as well as a multi-part "Halo" movie to be executive produced by Ridley Scott, similar to "Forward Unto Dawn," a "Halo"-based Internet series released alongside the last "Halo" game.

Xbox has also partnered with U.K. broadcaster Channel 4 to co-produce an eight-episode series called "Humans," an English version of a Swedish show set in a world where robotic servants exist to serve their human owners. Microsoft said casting on "Humans" will begin next month and production on the hour-long episodes will commence this summer.

Other pilots in development include a reality series starring former Australian soldier and shark attack survivor Paul de Gelder; an adaption of Warren Ellis' novel "Gun Machine" about a detective tracking a serial killer; and a variety comedy series featuring the JASH crew: comedians Sarah Silverman, Michael Cera, Reggie Watts, Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim.

In addition to "Halo," Tellem said Xbox Entertainment Studios is actively developing additional shows based on five other Microsoft Studios game franchises: long-running historical simulator "Age of Empires," sweeping fantasy saga "Fable," slick racing series "Forza," alien shoot-'em-up "Gears of War" and zombie survival horror game "State of Decay."



In this Aug. 28, 2013, file photo, the Microsoft Xbox One console is on display at the GameStop Expo in Las Vegas. Among the shows coming to Xbox this year are the street soccer docu-series "Every Street United," which will be first to debut in July 2014, and the six-part tech-centric documentary series "Signal to Noise." The first installment - "Atari: Game Over" - chronicles the search for copies of Atari's infamous "E.T." game that were supposedly buried in a landfill. (Photo by Al Powers/Invision/AP, File)

Microsoft Corp. is venturing into mostly uncharted territory with its plan to create new series. Sony Corp. only dabbled in original programming with three seasons of "The Tester," a reality competition that pit gamers against each other to win a job with Sony. The third season debuted in 2012 on the PlayStation 3, and Sony has no plans for a fourth edition.

Unlike such streaming content providers as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon, which push content to multiple gizmos, Xbox Originals won't be available to view everywhere. Depending on the series, they'll only be

streamed on certain devices, mostly the Xbox 360 and Xbox One, but possibly other Microsoft doodads, like the Surface tablet and the Windows Phone 8.

The move into show business comes a few years after Microsoft first proclaimed that Xbox consoles—now over 80 million strong with 48 million monthly Xbox Live subscribers—are used less for actually playing games online and more for listening to music and watching movies, shows and videos on apps from such content providers like HBO, Fox and Twitch.



In this May 21, 2013, file photo, Nancy Tellem, right, the entertainment and digital media president of Microsoft, and Bonnie Ross, left, general manager and studio head of 343 Industries, announce a new "Halo" live-action TV series for Xbox Live, during an event to unveil the next-generation Xbox One entertainment and gaming console system, in Redmond, Wash. The studio is working on a live-action series based on the "Halo" sci-fi shooter with filmmaker Steven Spielberg serving as an executive producer, as well as a multi-part "Halo"

movie to be executive produced by Ridley Scott. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File)

Sales of the Xbox One, Microsoft's latest console that's billed as an all-in-one entertainment device, have been successful but lagged behind Sony's PlayStation 4 since both consoles debuted last November. Microsoft noted in December that it sold 3 million Xbox One consoles, while Sony announced earlier this month that it has sold a total of 7 million PS4s.

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