

With restraint, YouTube rolls out original programming

February 9 2016, byDerrik J. Lang



This image provided by YouTube shows a scene from YouTube Red Original's "Lazer Team," which was the most funded original film in Indiegogo's history. It's been selling out hundreds of theaters for fan screenings since Jan. 27, 2016. However, many more devotees of Michael "Burnie" Burns and his Rooster Teeth production company will be able to watch the movie beginning Wednesday, Feb. 10, 2016, on YouTube. (YouTube via AP)

Michael "Burnie" Burns hears a discrepancy. Before greeting

moviegoers at the debut of his film, the writer-actor is eavesdropping on all the big-budget movie trailers playing ahead of his much smaller crowdfunded concoction, "Lazer Team."

Suddenly, a roar from a monster in one of the previews literally rattles the theater's walls.

"I bet the sound budget for that was bigger than the whole budget for my movie," the bearded Internet personality says with a grin.

Despite its modest price tag, there's a hefty amount of enthusiasm for the \$2.5 million sci-fi comedy about a group of dolts bestowed with alien technology.

"Lazer Team" was the most funded original film in Indiegogo's history, and it's been selling out hundreds of theaters for fan screenings since Jan. 27. However, many more devotees of Burns and his Rooster Teeth production company will be able to watch the movie beginning Wednesday on YouTube.

The streaming site is attempting to make some noise of its own with a crop of films and shows that will be exclusively available with YouTube Red, a subscription service the San Bruno, California-based company launched last October.



In this Sept. 17, 2015 file photo, Lilly Singh arrives at the 5th Annual Streamy Awards at the Hollywood Palladium in Los Angeles. "Lazer Team" was the most funded original film in Indiegogo's history, and it's been selling out hundreds of theaters for fan screenings since Jan. 27, 2016. In addition to "Lazer Team," YouTube Originals is launching with a documentary profiling YouTube comedienne Lilly "Superwoman" Singh embarking on a world tour, the dance flick "Dance Camp" starring young Internet personalities and a reality series centering on top YouTuber Felix "PewDiePie" Kjellberg living out his nightmares. (Photo by Rich Fury/Invision/AP, File)

Unlike the millions of other videos posted on the streaming site, "Lazer Team" and the other YouTube Originals will only be available with a YouTube Red subscription, which also provides ad-free access to the site and a music service for \$10 a month.

For their leap into premium programming, YouTube isn't attempting to imitate Netflix, Hulu or Amazon, which offer films and shows rivaling

traditional Hollywood content. While its first crop of movies and series don't look like they were filmed with a webcam in someone's basement, YouTube Originals also don't have the scope of a Marvel movie or an episode of "Game of Thrones" either.

"They're not trying to do something entirely different," said Burns, an online video pioneer who first went viral with "Red vs. Blue," a digital series inspired by the "Halo" video game franchise. "They're just taking YouTube to the next level."

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"We're fishing where there's fish," said Susanne Daniels, the former president of MTV who now serves as the global head of original content at YouTube. "We're working with top creators to do something they normally wouldn't do on their channel."

For its first show for YouTube Red, the site enlisted Kjellberg to swap playing scary video games on his channel to instead be dropped into frightening scenarios conceived by "The Walking Dead" creator Skybound Entertainment.



This image provided by YouTube shows YouTube Red Original's "Scare PewDiePie" with actor Felix Kjellberg. The streaming site is attempting to make some noise of its own with a crop of films and shows that will be exclusively available with YouTube Red, a subscription service the San Bruno, California-based company launched in Oct. 2015. (YouTube via AP)

"It is very different, but it's also very similar to what I do," said Kjellberg, who has more than 42 million subscribers. "I play horror games, and this is basically just taking that into the real world. It felt like a natural extension."

Meanwhile, "A Trip to Unicorn Island" profiles Singh's highs and lows as she stages a world tour showcasing her acting-and-dancing abilities—all while keeping up with her YouTube channel. The documentary doesn't shy away from showing the emotional tolls it took on Singh.

"It was such a different process for me," said Singh, who has more than 7.8 million subscribers. "I'm used to shooting and editing all my videos. It was very difficult for me to let go of that control and allow a director and editor capture me, but that's the beauty of it. You get to see me from a different point of view."

Besides selling \$10 subscriptions, the move into premium content is also an opportunity for YouTube to keep top talent from straying. Several high-profile YouTubers, such as Colleen "MirandaSings" Ballinger-Evans, Freddie Wong and "Awkward Black Girl" creator Issa Rae have recently been tapped by the likes of Netflix, Hulu and HBO for projects.

"It speaks to the power of YouTube to build these stars to a certain level that these other networks and platforms are interested in working with them," said Daniels. "It remains to be seen whether the fans will go find them on the other platforms."

YouTube currently has dozens of original programming projects in development for YouTube Red, and Daniels said they plan to roll out between 15 and 20 shows and films in 2016. They're also looking to stream films licensed from other outlets.



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Will millennials—YouTube's biggest audience—want to fork over \$10 to watch content on a site that's been giving it away for over a decade?

The streaming site declined to specify how many users have already signed up for YouTube Red or how much its spending on the original programming effort. However, Daniels is optimistic viewers won't click the dislike button.

"The hope is that it'll be like any subscription service," said Daniels. "It's a great value. I think viewers might first try it out because they're

interested in what 'PewDiePie' is up to with his series, but then they'll stick around to see other creators' projects and movies."

More information: www.youtube.com/red

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