

## Taking the 'TV' out of TV Shows

By KATE FLATLEY

**F**IVE HUNDRED CHANNELS and nothing on? Well, several new companies are hoping the Internet will help them change that.

A whole crop of new Web sites, or "broadband digital channels," are creating original entertainment programming that aims to break the mold of standard TV fare. When it becomes widely available over the next year, this service will be the first generation of digital television programming.

One such site already "on the air" is [www.crushedplanet.com](http://www.crushedplanet.com), the brainchild of the documentary filmmakers who brought prurient adult viewers HBO's "Taxicab Confessions." Joe and Harry Gantz's brand of voyeuristic reality programming has found a perfect home on the Web.

On Crushed Planet, viewers can watch the continuing saga of Jason and Crystal as they share their lives with the world in "First Apartment." This live, 24-hour-a-day documentary follows the young couple's every movement. And I mean every movement: Don't tune in at your desk if you sit in a high traffic area, or your co-workers are liable to catch an eyeful.

But the Gantz brothers don't stop with the uninhibited young cohabitators. There are four other programs on the site viewers can choose from. One show, "Couples Arguing," unfolds like a train wreck before our eyes. Couples who agreed to participate in the documentary beeped the film crew when an argument started, retreated to separate rooms and then resumed the fight in front of the Gantz's cameras.

While some of the new sites have slickly produced content utilizing the latest in high-tech data-compression techniques to make the films and shows stream more clearly for viewers with high-speed modems, the Gantz's think the gritty, choppy style of today's streaming video adds to their films' appeal.

"Our work is about the content more than the production value. Our younger audience feels it's more intimate, more raw, something you wouldn't see in mainstream television," says Mr. Gantz. Indeed, he couldn't have produced "Crushed Planet" for regular television venues, because of institutionalized censorship.

Nibblebox.com is another network that owes its existence to the freedom of the Internet. Launched April 15, it's a site where college students can present their original work online under the guidance of established directors, writers and producers. Nibblebox's co-CEO's, Doug Liman (who directed the films "Swingers" and "Go") and Elizabeth Hamburg, see their

site as an incubator for tomorrow's digital television pioneers.

From the pieces I watched, it looks as if they are on to something. Take "Virtual Rob," in which a guy in his apartment is "directed" by the viewer pointing and clicking around the screen—it's funnier than it sounds.

Beginning next month, even teens will have their own broadband channel: VOXXY.com. Co-founder Maxine Lapiduss has already lined up some A-list talent, including "Friends" star Jennifer Aniston, and "think tanks" of teens to appear onscreen.

Ms. Lapiduss and the channel's other co-founders, Kristi Kaylor and Hillary Carlip, all have their eyes on the future. They stressed that while they are launching on the Web, their real hope is to parlay their site into a viable, digital cable channel.

The network with the most variety I've seen in programming is Pseudo.com. It has four channels—music; life and entertainment; business, politics and science; and games and sports.

Pseudo teamed up with the Internet site The Hotline to cover the primary elections in February. Having chat moderators at the same desk as mainstream media pundits, including the Journal's own John Fund, allowed the viewing public to instantly rebut or agree with commentators, which brought an interesting twist to the standard format of political chat shows.

Pseudo's music-channel shows are street-smart and well produced, including the popular 88HipHop.com, one of the few Internet shows dedicated to the urban music scene. "Queendom," a show focused on

women in the male-dominated rap and hip hop industries, and Streetsound, a sub-channel devoted to electronica (heavily synthesized music with driving beats), are also lively and entertaining.

But what is most interesting is Pseudo's broad-ranging arts coverage. Moving beyond the celebrity-flooded entertainment sites, its channelP interviews performance artists like extreme-dance choreographer Elizabeth Sireb, the performers in the Off-Broadway show "De La Guardia and dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones. The interviews are mixed with clips of their performances to provide an Internet window into contemporary art sorely lacking elsewhere. Pseudo.com CEO David Bohman told me that new channelP shows have not been produced in a few months, but he hopes there will be new episodes soon—as do I.

This isn't to say everything on Pseudo's entertainment channel is good. Some of the shows, especially "Hollywood Outsiders," in which two annoying men blather about movies, smack of bad public-access television.

These and other networks are leading the way in Internet broadcasting, but there are new, well-funded, media-mogul competitors close on their heels. Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks and Ron Howard's Imagine Entertainment have teamed up to form pop.com, "an independent digital entertainment company created to produce and broadcast original internet-only programming," according to their press materials. The site has a launch date set for late spring.

The future of digital entertainment, like the future in general, is up for grabs.

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