

Published on Monday, Oct. 13, 2008

## **TheirTube: Websites compete for video uploading**

By BRIDGET CAREY



Thirteen hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. It's headquarters for the small-town nobody with a camcorder and dreams of stardom. But when there are hundreds of millions of videos that call YouTube home, it's tough to get noticed.

In the past several months, several South Florida entrepreneurs have launched websites hoping to lure those fame seekers to visit their sites. Unlike the free-for-all behemoth that is YouTube, these

new sites are keeping focused on a niche audience.

But can these smaller sites survive in a world where YouTube is so popular, it's used as a verb?

Two 21-year-olds from Coral Gables believe they can pull it off with TriFame.com, a site that acts as a star search for singing, dancing and modeling.

"I know the craze. You just turn on the TV and you can't get by without seeing America's Top something," said Navid Zolfaghari, chief executive of TriFame. "Millennials are spending more time online than on the TV. There's that potential for explosion."

And he's right. Online video popularity has grown as more homes upgrade to faster Internet connection speeds -- which in turn means advertisers are spending more for ads tied to online videos. According to research firm eMarketer, Internet advertising will jump about 30 percent, from \$12.5 billion to \$16 billion this year. And \$26.6 billion is predicted to be spent on online advertising in 2009, with \$1.5 billion going to video advertising.

Newcomers Openfilm.com, in North Miami, and ProjectBreakout.com, in Fort Lauderdale, have the same hunger for a piece of that video advertising pie. Openfilm focuses on high-quality short films and animations, and Project Breakout has talent competitions in channels for comedy, music, filmmaking, broadcasting and fitness.

But video is a growing part of all online media. Most major sites incorporate videos in some way, so it's only natural for the statistics to show an increase of people watching videos online.

There is an ample audience of fame-seekers wanting to upload videos of their talent. But in the world of online video, there is a difference between being successful in building an audience and being profitable, said JupiterResearch analyst Bobby Tulsiani.

Advertising within video is still a young frontier, and it takes thousands of clicks on a video for a site to make some reasonable profit from an ad. The method of overlaying an ad on top of a video has been the newest tactic. YouTube launched InVideo Ads in August 2007, which are overlays that appear on the bottom 20 percent of a video screen for 10 to 15 seconds as the video plays.

## **THE TRUST FACTOR**

This is seen to be less obtrusive for some users, who don't like waiting for a minute-long commercial to finish before they can start watching their video. Aaron Zamost, spokesman for YouTube, said overlay advertising is getting more response than regular stand-alone ads. Of course, not every video creator wants an ad sitting on their work of art, nor does every advertiser trust being associated with a user-generated video because of the unpredictable and untrustworthy nature of the video content.

"Online advertisers need to feel safe. They don't yet," Tulsiani said. "Even YouTube is struggling to make money right now."

And with the amount of competition out there, he said it's harder than ever to count on being acquired by a larger firm, which is what TriFame's founders are hoping for in a few years from now.

"People aren't throwing money at video sites like they were two years ago," Tulsiani said. "Video is a very tough business. It's not for the faint of heart."

His report, "Competing with YouTube," said niche topics are where success can be found. For one reason, they can obtain premium advertising rates with a highly targeted audience.

For example, Break.com targets young males, Hulu.com targets people needing to catch up on television shows, and Howcast.com reaches the how-to market.

## **NICHE FOCUS**

But he says the demographic interested in entertainment and talent competition videos is "a little harder to classify" since it is so broad, so it's too early to tell if a site like TriFame or Openfilm can benefit from their niche focus. And it's especially challenging considering that these startups picked a niche that YouTube already does well: showcasing talent and short films.

Having a more comprehensive site is what Tulsiani believes will help make a YouTube competitor more valuable and thereby more profitable.

And other relatively new media-upload sites are popping up with different flavors. Miami-based Veridoo.com is a social network divided into topic channels where users can upload and share various multimedia, including videos. Your Listen.com in Hollywood is all about uploading audio files.

And it's not just in South Florida. London-based Amuso.com lets users create their own talent contests for cash, rewards and recognition. California-based Outshouts.com lets users send messages with videos -- which is something like a virtual greeting card.

Project Breakout founder and chief executive Gregory Sukornyk realizes that one of his biggest challenges is to get people to see the value of his site and make the effort to spend time on it, in addition to YouTube.

"It's amazing how entrenched people are," Sukornyk said. "It's like your telephone number, you don't want to change it. You have to be that much better. You have to be that much more compelling to give people a reason to move house and create their profile on yours."

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