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Hollywood Vets Try Web Video

By Louis Hau
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Award-winning television and film producers Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick will premiere a Web-only dramatic series in November, in a move that could herald similar moves by other Hollywood veterans.

Herskovitz and Zwick's quarterlife isn't the first Internet video series produced by Hollywood heavyweights. In April, News Corp. (nyse: NWS - news - people)'s MySpace TV premiered daily episodes of Prom Queen, a Web-exclusive teen series bankrolled by former Disney Chief Executive Michael Eisner's Vuguru studio.

But while Prom Queen and subsequent Vuguru productions have shared the low-budget look and sensibility of semi-professional, or "prosumer," video clips, MySpace is touting quarterlife as the first to use "network quality" production values.

"It's a landmark moment not just for MySpace TV but for Internet video in general," MySpace TV General Manager Jeff Berman said.

Herskovitz and Zwick are producing 36 eight-minute episodes of quarterlife, a scripted drama centered around the lives of six twentysomething characters. Two episodes will debut every week beginning Nov. 11 on MySpace TV, which will have exclusive rights for the first 24 hours after each episode is posted.

Once that window passes, the episodes will also be available at Herskovitz and Zwick's forthcoming quarterlife.com Web site and other online distributors that will be announced later, according to a source close to the project.

MySpace TV's exclusive premiere rights extend through the first 36 episodes of quarterlife, the source said, adding that more episodes may be produced "if it's well received." One possible indication that Herskovitz and Zwick hope quarterlife will live on: they plan to develop quarterlife.com into an online social network for 18- to 34-year-olds.

The series will be streamed for free and will be supported by advertising. The ad formats haven't yet been finalized, but they may include product placements, Berman said. He also noted that MySpace users will be able to embed quarterlife episodes on their MySpace pages and blogs.

Herskovitz and Zwick are the Emmy Award-winning co-creators of the TV series thirtysomething and My So-Called Life; they have also produced hit movies, such as Traffic and Blood Diamond. Zwick directed the latter, as well as Glory, The Last Samurai and other films.

Why would these entertainment veterans try their hand at Web video? A key attraction: they will have complete creative control and full ownership of quarterlife, according to the source close to the project.

Even though the amount of revenue generated by online video remains small, the ability to capture a large share of the spoils through ownership of their creative output is coaxing other big-time producers to explore Web-only video projects as well.

MySpace TV has been "deluged by the professional creative community here and around the world about doing projects together," Berman said. "We're not in a world where these guys are leaving television or the movies. This is just another outlet for their extraordinary talent."

Other examples abound. FreemantleMedia, the production company behind American Idol, runs Atomic Wedgie, a mobile video service featuring comedy clips. Endemol, which produces Deal Or No Deal and Big Brother, is preparing an Internet video venture with online video distribution company Dave Networks.

Dave is also building a video destination site for Generate, a production and talent-management company co-founded by Jordan Levin, the former chief executive of the WB network, according to Dave Chief Executive Rex Wong.

"We're just seeing a big rush of TV producers trying to do Web-type stuff now," Wong says, adding, "I can pretty much safely say that every producer is looking at it."