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Section: Living

Failed NBC pilot to have revival with Web episodes

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Staff

Pasadena, Calif. -- Nobody's watching, my you-know-what.

NBC announced Friday that it had made a deal to create new Web episodes of the one-time failed series pilot "Nobody's Watching," with an eye toward bringing it back as a network show sometime next season.

"We want to do more of this kind of thing," NBC Entertainment President Kevin Reilly said at the Television Critics Association press tour here.

Shooting already has begun on the episodes of undetermined length that will hit the Internet within the next month; some of that material could be incorporated into the scripts that NBC has ordered developed for the more traditional TV series. "When there's a draw, this is the kind of thing we've got to try."

That "draw" he referred to is the online afterlife being enjoyed by the original "Nobody's Watching" pilot from "Scrubs" creator Bill Lawrence. In it, two young Ohio men frustrated by the current state of television jump at a network's offer to create their own sitcom. Unbeknownst to them, they become the subject of a reality series in which their every move is scripted and recorded by network executives.

NBC didn't pick up the pilot last year, and that seemed to be the end of that. Until it found its way several weeks ago onto YouTube, the popular video-posting site (www.youtube.com), where it's been downloaded 600,000 times. Given the Unseen Manipulative Network Hand at work in "Nobody's Watching," Reilly was asked if NBC Universal had anything to do with the pilot finding its way onto YouTube.

"We absolutely did not. I did not even know about it until I started getting e-mails," Reilly said. "Initially we attempted to clamp down on YouTube. We now in fact have gone into business with them for promotional efforts for our fall [shows.] That video, like everything else on YouTube at this point, none of it has

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official clearance. We allowed it to happen."

In other NBC news

The network will launch its fall season on Sept. 18, with a two-hour "Deal or No Deal," followed at 10 p.m. by the highly anticipated inside-television drama "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip" from "West Wing" creator Aaron Sorkin. In a one-time stunt, "Deal" will air four nights (taking Thursday off) during premiere week. Reilly patted NBC on the back for not running last winter's surprise hit "Deal" this summer, while getting in a shot at rival Fox at the same time.

"We showed a tremendous amount of restraint as networks go," Reilly said. "Had we [aired it], I think we would be absolutely dominating this summer and 'So You Think You Can Dance' would have been a far distant second place." > Filmmaker Spike Lee is working on ideas for two drama series with NBC, announced this week. One would be set in New Orleans. > Preliminary conversations are under way with Jay Leno about a continuing role for "The Tonight Show" host when he hands over the reins to Conan O'Brien in 2009. "We never thought for a second Jay was going to just go gardening," Reilly said. They're talking about a couple of ideas, although you can scratch one off the list. "Jay doesn't want to do specials," said Reilly, who tamped down any talk Leno might not give up "Tonight." "It's full steam ahead" for the O'Brien takeover in 2009, he said. > Joining a growing network trend, "ER" will return for its 13th season on Sept. 2 and will run straight through -- with no repeats -- for 12 episodes, then make way for new drama "The Black Donnellys." "ER" then returns in April with all new episodes. John Stamos joins the cast full time, and Andre Braugher will have a guest-starring arc.

In perhaps the most intriguing news, ex-"Frasier" dad John Mahoney will play a drag queen who wants to assume authority for his dying partner's medical care.

MORE ONLINE

. For more from the Television Critics Association press tour in Los Angeles, www.accessAtlanta.com.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

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