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Webisodes are worth the time; Web DVR software would make the time

THERE WAS A MOMENT in the evolution of online entertainment when something clicked. Maybe it was right around the time of Joss Whedon's Web hit "Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog." Or NBC Universal's "Gemini Division." Maybe even CBS Corp.'s "Stephen King's N."

All of the sudden, webisodes got good.

So after a steady influx of serialized short-form series endemic to the Internet, this should be the point where someone out there programming for the Web should be taking a victory lap, heralding the breakthrough of a new source for original creative.

No such luck. There really hasn't been any one webisode that has seized the public imagination like "lonelygirl15," which has been the standard-bearer for the genre for too long. When your reigning hit is about 2½ years old, something isn't right.

If there's an increasing amount of quality out there but no traction for these efforts, what's wrong? Perhaps the problem inhibiting growth in this space is not the programming but fine-tuning the episodic programming experience.

The good news is that there is a wealth of original material out there piquing my interest. The bad news is all these webisodes are scattered all over the Internet on portals or destination sites.

My current viewing pattern is: I see a Web series I enjoy, I watch the latest episode, and then I never see it again. That's because seeing the next episode means it is incumbent upon me to come back to that Web site when and if that episode is ready. That's insane.

What the Web needs is a browser-based DVR, like a one-stop-shop media player that will aggregate RSS feeds for online-only original series. Unfortunately, there are a few dozen Web sites that claim to do just that but either focus their energies on the premium programming already collecting space on my television's DVR (see Hulu, Adobe Media Player) or relegating entire sites comprising multiple Web series to just one RSS feed or other restrictions (see Odeo, Veoh, Pyro, Miro, Mefeedia, Fireant, Invision, Fwd, etc.).

But blame should not be laid entirely at aggregation sites. The individual programmers are just as responsible and ultimately have more at stake. But as it stands, every webisode out there is presented as if it is the only piece of content in existence and you will be so wowed that you won't drift anywhere

WEBISODES TO WATCH

It might be hard to stick with them, but here are some noteworthy webisodes released this year

**Mayne Street**
ESPN.com

Wry "SportsCenter" anchor Kenny Mayne offers a faux behind-the-scenes look at the fine art of sitting at an anchor desk and wisecracking. In the same enjoyable vein as ESPN's commercials.

**Coma**
Crackle.com

Michael Madsen plays a mobster who gets gunned down to the consternation of George Hamilton, who hams it up as a crooked mayor with whom he's in cahoots. Hammy but engaging.

**Get Hit**
IFC.com

Creators and stars Peter Blomquist and Jeff Wiens satirize the viral video craze with a mockumentary about the making of the fictional "Spud Gun Warrior" in this manic misadventure.

**Web Therapy**
LStudio.com

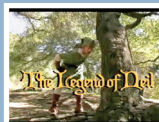
Lisa Kudrow brings the same neurotic insanity she delivered in HBO's "The Comeback" to her role here as a psychotherapist who is probably crazier than her clients.

**Blah Girls**
MySpace.com

Who better than Ashton Kutcher to exec produce a vivisection of celebrity culture. "Blah" brings to mind "South Park" and "The Daily Show" if its writers read Us Weekly instead of the New York Times.

**Get Your War On**
236.com

Adapted from a cult favorite cartoon strip by David Rees, "War" is a savagely profane critique of political mores. Don't be deceived by the simple style; you'll be amazed how hilarious a phone conversation between office drones can be.

**The Legend of Neil**
Atom.com

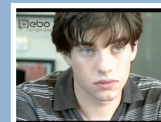
The theme song of this "Zelda" parody sells itself: "Neil ... was drunk playing a game of 'Zelda' when he ... asphyxiated himself with a Nintendo game controller and that somehow transported him into the game."

**Republicrats**
MSN.com

The series documents the presidential run of Sean Masterson, a former weatherman who doesn't seem to possess any greater qualification for higher office than a 12% accuracy rate in climate prediction.

**The Line**
Crackle.com

"Saturday Night Live's" Bill Hader plays Josh, an amiable nerd who shows up at his local cinema 11 days early for "Star Wars" spoof "FutureSpace." He struggles to keep his place in line in this raucous valentine to fanboy culture.

**The Secret World of Sam King**
Bebo.com

Sam is a scrappy teenager who doesn't let the fact he is an intern at Universal Music Group stop him from pursuing delusions of grandeur starting his own record label. He even meets real-life acts including Sam Sparro.

else. That's not going to happen.

I could bookmark the series, but that's not going to remind me when a new episode is ready. Some programmers have e-mail and SMS message notifications to do that, which I find intrusive. Why can't this process take place inside an agnostic media player?

This piece of software also would need to do more than just aggregate for me. It should be embeddable in social networks, which is not only an example of serving the customer where they live but also just plain good business sense. A player stocked with programs that sits on my profile page is basically free marketing, allowing any connected friends to

hop on whatever bandwagon I'm riding.

In time, this player of my dreams should also be able to migrate to other platforms — namely my mobile phone and television — so that I can either take my programs with me or sample them on a bigger screen. Again, this kind of innovation would maximize exposure, either via a pass-along device like an iPhone or on a couch built for more than just me in my living room.

Original online entertainment is gaining momentum, but the presentation requires more sophistication. It's got a fan in me. Now don't let me get away.

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