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The Vee Pee's New Tee Vee

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02:00 AM Apr, 06, 2005

Former Vice President Al Gore unveiled a new interactive cable TV channel for the internet generation Monday that blends the immediacy of video blogging with the voyeurism of reality TV.

[Current TV](#), formerly known as IndTV, will be launched Aug. 1 and will aim to combine the interactivity of the internet with the couch-potato pleasures of TV.

The new channel will air short-form (15-second to 5-minute) news, arts and entertainment videos for 18- to 35-year-olds.

Audience members will be encouraged to not only watch but also shoot, edit and upload their own bite-sized digital video segments to the Current TV website. If the editors and web audience like the segments, they will then be broadcast to the channel's potential viewer pool of 19 million.

"We are asking you to submit your videos and to take part in creating this new network," Gore said Monday night at a hip-hop party in San Francisco attended by several thousand hipsters, including actors Sean Penn and Leonardo DiCaprio, hip-hop stars Mos Def and Talib Kweli, Crown City Rockers, Michael Franti and Spearhead.

Would-be contributors, called CJs, or Current Journalists, are encouraged to visit [Current Studio](#), a website that will guide them through the production process.

However, nobody is going to get rich. Current TV pay starts at about \$250 per segment. Indeed, many CJs have begun to submit content already in response to the company's \$15,000 Video Challenge.

The winner, announced at Monday's party, was Campaign Ad, a dramatization exposing the practice of deliberately misleading election campaign commercials.

The amateur programs will be mixed with in-house programming, such as a segment every half-hour on the most popular search terms on Google. The search engine will provide the data and the cable channel will either announce the items on-air or produce short video segments on the topics. A video on the movie *Sin*

City (the fourth-most-searched-for term Tuesday), for example, may include box office information, reviews and a short clip of the film.

Current aims to develop a new kind of television, which has been made possible by the availability of low-cost digital video cameras and editing packages. It may be the biggest and most organized video blogging effort afoot, but it certainly will not be the only one. On Monday, for example, Google made a separate announcement that it will begin accepting and archiving amateur video footage.

Current's short-form videos will be mixed and matched in what the channel is calling the TV equivalent of the iPod shuffle. It will all be tied together with MTV-style video jockeys. Topics will range from trends in technology, fashion and video games, to young people's opinions on spirituality, finance and politics.

Programming already in the can includes Current Playlist (music), Current Parent (parenting), Current Gig (careers) and Current Soul (spirituality).

The network also promises to develop a strong online presence. "We hope to give each programming strand its own website," said Current TV's interactive producer, Rod Naber, but the channel is still trying to figure out if it can archive all the digital video content online.

Current TV will, like most channels, be supported by advertising and cable subscriptions. However, executives also are looking to introduce alternative advertising models, such as branding.

"Our goal is to do something different because we think the 30-second TV slot is broken," said Anne Zehren, Current TV's president of sales and marketing. "We will work with (advertisers) to customize their commercials and experiment with new forms of advertising."

In August, Current TV will be broadcast in place of Newsworld International, a cable channel purchased for \$70 million last May by Gore and a group of investors, including Current CEO Joel Hyatt, Silicon Valley luminary Bill Joy (co-founder of Sun Microsystems) and financier Richard Blum.

"I am optimistic that they (Current) will provide an alternative voice for youth and gay culture," said Gayle Roberts, a San Francisco-based fund-raiser who attended the event. "But I still don't have a clue what the programs will be really like. Upscale cable access?"

Rants & Raves

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