



PIE TOWN IN THE NEWS

WE tv Expands Beyond Weddings Niche

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The honeymoon isn't necessarily over for WE tv, but the network that carved out a niche for itself with series such as *Bridezillas* and *Platinum Weddings* is expanding beyond the matrimonial space.

WE tv on Tuesday afternoon unveiled its 2010-11 programming slate, a clutch of unscripted series that ditches the familiar bridal fare at the altar. While the concepts don't all break new TV ground, the new shows are still something of a departure for the Cablevision-owned network.

Billed as a *Melrose Place* for the Geritol set, the upcoming strip *Sunset Daze* offers viewers a glimpse at the hard-partying residents of an Arizona retirement community. WE ordered 10 episodes of the half-hour series, which bows April 28 at 10 p.m.

Also in the works is *Mother Knows Best*, another joint effort from Joan and Melissa Rivers. Set to debut in the fourth quarter, the show tracks the chaos that ensues when the tart-tongued comedienne moves in with her daughter and her live-in boyfriend.

This fall will also give rise to the premiere of *Downsized*, a one-hour series that's like an unscripted *Brady Bunch* for the TARP era. Having lost its home to foreclosure, a Sun Belt family of nine has to learn how to live within their (extremely) limited means.

Much of the new output was whipped up by newcomer John Miller, who in October 2009 came to WE tv from The Weinstein Co. As svp, original productions & development, Miller has begun making tonal shifts at the network, recasting the sixth season of *Bridezillas* to introduce "more eloquent, more relatable" subjects and recrafting certain narrative arcs so that the shows might resonate more deeply with viewers.



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“We like conflict, but not so much that you feel you have to take a bath afterward,” said Miller, who added that shows like *Bridezilla* could use a little less “crazy.”

Miller was quick to note that he had arrived at a network that was “already in fantastic shape,” and that his role was to “spruce things up a bit.” Much of the new programs in development reflect Miller’s resolutely positive outlook, depending as they do on depictions of nontraditional family life.

Not that WE tv’s in any danger of turning into *Maude Flanders* any time soon.

“We want to be positive, but not overly earnest,” Miller said. “We want to take on an upbeat, almost sassy sort of tone. But we don’t want to be the empowerment network for women and we’re not going to be as in-your-face as *Oxygen*.”

Kim Martin, president and general manager of WE tv, said the network isn’t turning its back entirely on its bridal-themed programming, adding that shows like *My Fair Wedding* and *Bridezillas* were a big part of the network’s success in 2009. (WE saw its prime-time deliveries grow 8 percent versus the previous year, as the network averaged 291,000 nightly viewers. Of those, nearly 65 percent were members of the core women 25-54 demo.)

“The finale of last season’s *Bridezillas* was the most-watched program in our history,” Martin said. “So while we will build our demos with the new line-up, we’re going to continue to program out year-round Sunday night bridal block, which has been a real touchstone for so many women.”

Since Martin and Miller joined forces, WE has enjoyed continued growth among its core demos. Per Nielsen ratings data, the network grew its Q1 deliveries of women 18-49 by 7 percent versus the same time a year ago, while women 25-54 were up 2 percent. All told, the network’s prime-time deliveries were up 3 percent in the quarter, to 267,000 viewers.



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At present, WE is seeing “double-digit” CPM increases versus its 2009-10 upfront rates, while scatter volume is “very healthy.” Scott Collins, evp of national advertising sales, WE tv, said that clients have begun registering their money earlier than was the case a year ago, when scatter dollars were coming in extremely close to air-date.

Per SNL Kagan analysis, WE tv took in net ad sales revenues of \$102.3 million in 2009, up 23 percent from the previous year’s \$83.1 million.

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