

# Cooking Classes on the Small Screen

## High-Quality Cooking Series Make Their Mark Online

By Gina Pace



Tamra Davis, filming an episode of the "Tamra Davis Cooking Show." (Tamra Davis)

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outlet like the Food Network - but felt that she didn't share the "big smiles and bright lights," style of the cable channel, and her cooking methods leaned more towards vegetarian and healthy fare. Having started her career in the early days of MTV directing music videos, she was drawn by the under-five-minute format that a Web show could provide.

"I love that as a filmmaker, I have the possibility that all I need is myself and an idea, and I have all the equipment I need - a camera and a computer - and I can create my own show," Davis said. "With all those possibilities that the Internet can offer, it's fantastic that you can do this all yourself."

Davis' show, the "[Tamra Davis Cooking Show](#)," is one of a growing number of specialty cooking shows attracting fans on the Internet. While many Internet users might hear "online cooking show" and think of a guy in a kitchen filming himself and posting it on YouTube, these shows have good production values and a unique point of view, ranging from healthy meals for kids to mixology for women.

(CBS) Tamra Davis has directed a variety of Hollywood projects, including episodes of "Ugly Betty," "Grey's Anatomy," and the Adam Sandler cult classic "Billy Madison."

But one of her latest projects is a lot closer to home - it's inside her kitchen. Rather than a big production crew, Davis sets up tripods around her kitchen, and films herself cooking healthy meals for her kids. And the distribution network? It's her own Web site.

Davis considered trying to create a show for an

For young producers, creating an online show can be a way to showcase talent. Brothers Greg and Darin Bresnitz spent months pitching a show to TV networks that would combine cooking with live music.

"No one took both sides seriously," said Darin Bresnitz, 27. "It would be like good bands and someone making a PB&J, or like Emeril where there's a guest musician like Aaron Neville performing."

They also found that since the idea had been tossed around at networks for so many years - but hadn't gained traction - executives were hesitant to take a chance on the concept.

So the brothers signed on with [ON Networks](#), a distribution network for original programming shot on HD, to create a show with New York chef Sam Mason, who earned a reputation for innovative cuisine while working at restaurants like WD-50 and Tailor. The brothers initially found him by Googling "hipster chef," and approached Mason to film the show. The first season of "Dinner with the Band," which began airing in 2007, shows Mason cooking with indie bands like Matt and Kim and Tokyo Police Club.

This year, it caught the attention of the IFC, a cable channel that shows independent films and original programming, and is currently airing "[Food Party](#)," a surreal food show, complete with puppets, that also had a gestation period online.

In a market where it's harder to get funding to make a TV show, evidence of success is crucial.

"It was already a show, we had eight episodes," said Darin Bresnitz. "We already had a proven, viable idea that was incubated online."

The brothers are currently building a studio, complete with kitchen, to film the show, which is slated to begin airing in 2010.

"It's an unbelievable stepping stone," said Greg Bresnitz of creating a Web show, then making the jump to television. "There's no way we'd be here if it wasn't for that."

But many who create cooking shows like to be online for the multimedia options it presents. Emma Piper-Burket and Sophia Brittan met as college students and decided in 2006 to create a cooking Web site. [Kitchen Caravan](#) was launched after Brittan graduated from culinary school and Piper-Burket finished working on her first feature film.

"When we started, we couldn't find many Web sites that were trying to create the whole experience: the recipe bank, the blog, articles, the show," said Piper-Burket, who also works on documentary film projects, including one on the agricultural history of Iraq. "We wanted to try and make it a big, cohesive thing."

The duo infuses their interest in international affairs with food, creating episodes based on topics like Ethiopian spices, Burmese spirits or Afghan saffron. They are currently filming their summer season on a farm near Eugene, Ore. to focus on local and sustainable ingredients.

And while a video of Afghan saffron is a pretty niche topic, that is exactly what makes Web cooking shows so appealing, said Natalie Bovis-Nelsen, who is developing a show about cocktails geared towards women. She is working with the [Small Screen Network](#), which specializes in videos about spirits.

"You can get some really concise, specific knowledge," said Bovis-Nelsen of the shows, which tend to be three to four minutes long. "The goal is to create quality content, but we have a lot more freedom than a cable show or network would have, and that gives us the freedom to explore new territory."

But as more content is available on the Internet, the issue becomes sorting through all the noise.

"The goal is to find the right channels and venues to put quality content on a Web site, where viewers can find them and be able to distinguish from some guy frying up pancakes to someone who is imparting knowledge and professional experience to share with a consumer in a very immediate way," said Bovis-Nelsen, who recently released a book of virgin cocktails, "Preggatinis: Mixology for the Mom-to-Be."

As the shows evolve, creators like Davis hope the visual cooking lessons will motivate families to get into the kitchen.

"Just being able to see it makes it more accessible, so people think, 'Oh, I can do that,'" Davis said. "It inspires people to cook more - which is always a good thing."

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