Chapter 2

Social TV Guides

Curating Social Media for Content Discovery

After graduating from Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Las Vegas, world wrestling fanatic Brandon Stratton moved to Austin, Texas, to begin his new career as a professional chef. Brandon first got into Twitter while promoting his fine dining restaurant. The 36-year-old long-haired, tattoo-sporting husband and father recently opened Sputnik, a traditional burger and hot dog joint in the hipster East 6th Street area of the city.

In lieu of a chef's coat, Brandon cooks his culinary masterpieces wearing death metal t-shirts and jeans. While his passion for sharing good food and love of the extreme side of music may seem like an unusual combination, Brandon built up a community on Twitter (despite his early doubts about the usefulness of the platform) of like-minded chefs who use the hashtag #foodporndeathsquad that Brandon created. Although he is (figuratively) strapped to his restaurant's kitchen for 12 hours at a time, when he does go home, Brandon is a TV junkie —one who is now addicted to engaging on the Twitter backchannel while watching his favorite shows, which include *The First 48*, *True Blood*, *Dexter*, and *The Walking Dead*.

One night in 2011, while Brandon was catching the latest broadcast of *WWE Monday Night Raw*, he noticed a tweet on the backchannel from former WWE writer and producer David Lagana (@Lagana). David's tweet contained a link to SocialGuide, an online television guide powered by the social media backchannel. Since Brandon values David's opinions about wrestling as both a thought leader and influencer (the best kind of "social impression"), he was curious to find out what SocialGuide was all about.

His first reaction, after clicking the Twitter link and visiting the SocialGuide website, was that it seemed "Kind of like a TV guide, but with people talking about stuff." And because of his existing fondness for the backchannel as a means to get into playful taunts with other TV wrestling fans, Brandon immediately downloaded the SocialGuide mobile app to his HTC EVO 4G smartphone.

Brandon recognizes that it is human nature to want to socialize with people having similar interests. Since his wife, a grocery store bakery manager, does not share his work hours, Brandon's social outlet has become his virtual coviewing television experience. It allows him to express his opinions about TV shows as a real-time conversation with a broad spectrum of people.

Brandon welcomes SocialGuide as an alternative to his Time Warner onscreen channel guide, because he finds it to be "10 times faster" when looking for TV shows. He likes how SocialGuide automatically presents the most social shows that are currently airing, versus having to scroll through hundreds of channels that he never watches just to try and find out when *Iron Chef America* is on, tune in, and let people know he is watching it. And because SocialGuide aggregates the Twitter backchannel through the app itself, Brandon often launches it on his smartphone while he's at work—just to check which shows people are discussing the most and browsing the conversation vibe to ensure he is not missing out on something good.

Brandon explains that he uses SocialGuide up to 30 times daily while watching television on his days off. The music industry-exec-turned-chef now prefers to tweet into the backchannel through SocialGuide since the application makes it easy to share. He likes having the "(via @Social_Guide)" stamp appended to his backchannel Twitter posts, since he feels that it provides something different than "just shooting out random tweets." He admits that since Twitter is embedded into the app, pure laziness is part of his motivation to also tweet from SocialGuide; he doesn't want to take the trouble of switching back and forth between the Twitter and SocialGuide smartphone apps.

Since Brandon does not have a DVR—and because of the nature of his job— his television time is normally relegated to windows that span from midnight to three o'clock in the morning, and 10 in the morning until noon. Because of his somewhat odd schedule, Brandon relies on SocialGuide as a way to help him easily find shows to watch. He enjoys the serendipitous nature of seeing shows bubble to the top of the app that he would never have remembered to even consider watching on his own accord.

A significant reason that Brandon engages on the backchannel through SocialGuide is that he finds it fun to have instant access to a massive group of strangers who are watching television at the same time. He hopes that by sharing what he is watching on Twitter using SocialGuide, someone following him might discover the show and start watching it too. After all, the backchannel was the way in which Brandon discovered SocialGuide, and now he cannot imagine watching television without it. As far as Brandon's concerned, the days of using the default cable system's onscreen channel guide are over.

A Channel Guide Is More Than Just a

Program Listings Grid

TV Guide cemented its place in television history making the notion of a television broadcast schedule human. The weekly digest featured editorial, photos, and cover art that triggered powerful and directionally opposite emotions of anticipation and nostalgia. After buying up a number of regional television listings publications (the likes of which included *TV Forecast, TV Digest,* and *Television Guide*), Walter Annenberg created the first publication of national scale to provide television viewers with both broadcast and local TV listings.[1]

The first issue of *TV Guide* launched on April 3, 1953, and featured newborn Desi Arnaz Jr. front-and-center on the magazine's cover. A small headshot of Lucille Ball appeared on the cover's upper right-hand corner just below the headline "LUCY'S $50,000,000 BABY" in a red block typeface.

At a price of just 15 cents, *TV Guide*'s initial distribution encompassed 10 cities and sold 1.5 million copies in its first year. Growing to a circulation of 20 million by 1970 made *TV Guide* the largest weekly magazine in the world.

From its beginning, *TV Guide* established itself as the authority on television programming. The magazine's ever-popular fall preview issues were always an anticipated delight in subscribers' mailboxes. It was not uncommon for television viewers to scour each issue of *TV Guide* using a pen or highlighter (sometimes two different colors) to plan their personalized television schedule for the upcoming week.[2]

In its early days, *TV Guide*'s program listings were comparatively basic, as there were only three television networks in 1953: National Broadcasting Company, Columbia Broadcasting System, and the DuMont Television Network. In order to account for the differences in localized programming within various geographic regions, *TV Guide* published 180 local editions at its peak. While the articles and covers remained the same, it was, of course, the actual TV listings that differed across various editions.

The popularity of *TV Guide* issues as collectors' items due to the magazine's covers led the publication to begin experimenting with "split covers" in the early 1990s, following Rupert Murdoch's purchase of the company. For example, the January 26, 1991 issue of *TV Guide* had two different covers: one of them featured a photo of Cybill Shepherd to promote her upcoming TV movie, *Which Way Home,* while the other showcased the 25 most memorable Super Bowl moments in history.[3] Although the covers were different, the content inside was the same and included both feature stories.

However, two covers were not enough on August 24, 1996 when *TV Guide* celebrated *Star Trek*'s thirtieth birthday. The magazine created four different covers this time, each of which featured the "captain" of a different *Star Trek* TV series, including *The Next Generation*, *Voyager*, and *Deep Space Nine* in addition to the original *Star Trek* series.

While the magazine's debut issue is the most sought-after (and hence most expensive), several *TV Guide* back issues that sport vintage superheroes are at the top of collectors' lists. For example, the September 25, 1953 *TV Guide* features George Reeves as both Clark Kent and Superman. On the cover of the March 26, 1966 issue, Batman (played by Adam West) makes a fighting pose, complete with the show's iconic "POW" exclamation. On April 26, 1958 *Zorro* fans saw their masked hero making his signature "Z" with his sword.[4]

As the number of television networks and cable channels continued to grow, it became much more logistically complex for *TV Guide* to print and distribute all possible permutations of program listings. It also became increasingly more navigationally cumbersome for readers trying to discover new shows. While advances in technology that gave way to the emergence of electronic programming guides (EPGs) solved both issues, it led to the demise of *TV Guide* itself.

By 2005, the magazine's circulation had dropped more than fourfold. After 52 years, *TV Guide* printed the last of its original digest-sized format on October 9, 2005. The final issue was published with one of nine different possible covers, each a modern day re-creation of classic *TV Guides*. For instance, Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa replicated the 1966 *I Dream of Jeannie* cover; the cast of *Scrubs* appeared as the 1976 cast of *M*A*S*H*; and even Homer Simpson dressed up as *The Flintstones'* leading man Fred Flintstone, who had originally appeared on the popular June 13, 1964 *TV Guide* cover.[5]

TV Guide Magazine, as it is now called, is still in publication today. At a larger dimensional size and printing only two editions (instead of 140), the new *TV Guide* is very different from its digest-sized predecessor. Program listings have become relegated to a simple grid, and the magazine focuses predominately on editorial and commentary.

The Origin of the Electronic Programming Guide

Almost three decades after *TV Guide* was originally published, the first electronic program guide (EPG) became available in North America. Simply called "The Electronic Program Guide" in 1981, the service—developed by United Video Satellite Group[6]—provided its software to cable TV head-end master facilities, which in turn broadcasted the EPG as a dedicated cable channel.

Back then, the program guide rendered TV listings that automatically scrolled over the full television screen. A broadcast window of four hours displayed as 30-minute increments were available to view at any point in time during its continuous loop. A mainframe computer in Oklahoma transmitted

program updates using a 2,400 baud modem as a communications link to each of the computers running the Electronic Program Guide.

The second half of the decade saw a number of improvements to the EPG. A 1985 software upgrade enabled cable companies to lightly customize how the guide was broadcast. In addition to setting the scroll speed, text-based ads could be inserted either as a banner along the bottom of the EPG or amidst its scrolling TV listings. In 1988, the EPG service was rebranded as "Prevue Guide"[7] and another software upgrade introduced the notion of a split screen. The channel grid became 50 percent its size and appeared on the bottom half of the split, while the top half of the screen supported video. This allowed viewers access to more dynamic content while they waited for the guide to cycle through all of the TV listings.

Come March of 1993, a major redesign of Prevue Guide updated the EPG's look, layout, and added closed captioning as well as VCR Plus+ logos (remember those?). Later that same year, Prevue Guide became known as "Prevue Channel"; it updated its hardware and—perhaps most notably—introduced short original content features as a means to draw an audience.

Toward the end of the nineties, United Video Satellite Group (who created and owned the EPG software) purchased *TV Guide*. Within a year, they were acquired themselves by Gemstar International Group. The "TV Guide Channel" was introduced in the midst of the acquisitions as Prevue Guide's new brand.

By the time the new millennium rolled around, the TV Guide Channel was offering full-length original programming, leading to its new name—"TV Guide Network," which made its debut on June 4, 2007. By 2010, the once full-screen channel guide that became half its size in the late eighties was now a simple one-line grid that occupied the bottom quarter of the TV screen. By this time, most television viewers had already made the shift to much more usable interactive programming guides (IPGs) on their set-top cable or satellite boxes.

Interactive Programming Guides Gave TV Viewers Control

There were obvious limitations to the original electronic programming guide— the most glaring of which was the amount of time that viewers were forced to wait until a block of channels one cared about scrolled into view. If an unexpected event like the phone ringing or the oven timer buzzing took a viewer's attention away from the screen, they would have to wait for the entire channel lineup to once again cycle through.

Along with the advent of digital set-top boxes came a new way for TV viewers to discover what was on television by actually interacting with the onscreen guide. What has become a very familiar user experience by today's

standards, IPGs introduced the ability for television audiences to self-scroll, select, and click into deeper levels of information about a given show's episode, set program reminders, personalize TV listings, and change the channel from within the guide.

Of course, all of this constantly changing program data needs to come from somewhere. So in lieu of managing and maintaining it themselves, cable and satellite companies rely on third-party aggregators who handle all of the meta-data from updates to distribution. While there are a number of players in the IPG data space, Tribune Media Services is the nation's leading provider.[8] The company has a dedicated team of people whose sole job is to gather and organize the most recent TV meta-data from television programs airing on every network and local station.

Tribune Media's channel lineup database contains over 22,000 different channel maps for use by various cable, satellite, and phone companies—accounting for 2,700,000 television episodes. In addition to listings, schedule information, and channel lineups, Tribune's data feed also includes TV network logos and other photos. Microsoft, TiVo, Comcast, and Yahoo! are some of the companies that use Tribune as the source of their respective interactive program guides; not just for their set-top boxes, but also for their websites and mobile solutions.

The Internet poses a growing alternative for source data given the accessibility of and ease at which data can be integrated as an interoperable set of Web services.[9] Coined "electronic service guides" (ESGs), these feeds are comprised of a vast array of multimedia content and advertising[10] that can feed any number of devices including connected TVs, which we address in Chapter 9.

Increased TV Content Has Led to Decreased Programming Guide Usefulness

Because of the way people consume content these days, you have to be able to tell them what's on now, what's on their DVR, and what's available online via Netflix, Hulu, and other services—and bring that together in one, integrated place.

—Cory Bergman, Founder of Lost Remote

Back in 1953, when there were only three television networks, it was a pretty straightforward endeavor to find something to watch at any given point. Today, however, there are over 500 channels for TV viewers to attempt to navigate. Add to the mix TV shows from video on demand, DVR, Netflix, Hulu Plus, iTunes, and full episode players, and we end up with more television programming from which to choose than ever before. Yet in spite of so much

choice, masses of people continue to complain, "There is nothing to watch."

The root cause of the issue is not a lack of good programming; instead, it is the need for a single source that viewers can use to simply discover and plan television content. The onscreen interactive program guide is reaching its usable limits. Despite its "interactivity," the IPGs linear features are becoming progressively less helpful in trying to find something to watch.

Additionally, an increasing accessibility of data has created opportunities for developers to invent the "next generation" television programming guide. Cory Bergman of popular social TV blog *Lost Remote* sees recommendations as the center point of the television screen:

> *We're starting to get to the point where we have enough data so that someone who puts together a good algorithm could start suggesting really impactful stuff that people want to watch. When that happens, we'll get to a point where you won't just see the last channel you watched when you turn on your television set; instead, there will be a recommendations screen. And all of a sudden, that screen will become the most important and valuable and expensive real-estate in television.*

Therefore, in the wake of an increasingly complex television landscape, the key to future programming guides' success is to be incredibly simple to use.

Is There Anything Simpler Than Word-of-Mouth?

If a person you completely trust tells you that you must watch a particular TV show, your propensity to tune in is likely to be extremely high. Similarly, if thousands of people on the backchannel are causing a television broadcast to trend, chances are that you are going to take notice.

Social media is fueling an alternative to the "traditional" programming guide to which eager TV viewers—as well as television networks—are turning. Twitter's promoted trends (in which an advertiser can purchase a hashtag that appears at the top of Twitter's trend list for 24 hours) was fraught with television show names during the 2011 fall season premiere. For instance, on September 22, 2011 the promoted trend for the day was #CharliesAngels, which linked to a promoted tweet from an ABC Twitter account for the series that read, "Go behind the scenes of ABC's new #CharliesAngels, premiering tonight at 8|7c on ABC! youtu.be/RZ91zEMTVFA." The idea behind using promoted trends is, of course, to spark the conversation about the show on Twitter before it airs—something that would hopefully lead to heightened awareness and ultimately, greater tune in.

All of these conversations—which take place within the real-time social web

about television—deliver results in the form of massive amounts of data. The serendipitous nature of a one-off can certainly affect content discovery as individual tweets or Facebook posts. But what is even better is when the collective public social stream about TV creates a new way to look at what is on television.

Because of this, the market has become filled with a number of online guides looking to take advantage of the power of social media. It seems as though there is a new social programming guide (SPG, also referred to as a social TV guide) popping up once a month—each of which put their own spin and flair on matching TV shows to their respective audiences. The one common thread that runs throughout SPGs is that they all—in some way—leverage the power of community to cut through the content noise to surface relevant programming.

We do not attempt to identify every player within the entire social TV guide landscape within this chapter; such an undertaking would need much more time and space. Instead, we highlight a few key apps by way of showcasing the broad range of utility within this category.

SocialGuide Is Powered by the Backchannel

You turn on your TV and you go to the on-screen guide. That guide actually worked for consumers 30 years ago, when there were only 50 or a 100 channels, because you could actually scroll within four or five clicks to see what was on TV. Now there are 1,000 channels, and statistics show that half the people who have HD TVs don't even know what their HD channels are. We thought that adding social intelligence into an SPG format would be a good way for consumers to find out what's on television.

—Sean Casey, Founder and CEO at SocialGuide

SocialGuide launched in February 2011 after entering an R&D deal with none other than Tribune Media Services. Billed as the first real-time social guide for television, SocialGuide's ability to marry the backchannel to US television listings (thanks to Tribune's data) provides a compelling, new TV discovery tool and filter by which to surface the most social TV shows.

After downloading the SocialGuide app, first-time users are asked to enter their zip code and specify their cable provider. Based on this information, SocialGuide's intelligence engine creates a localized SPG that ranks shows in the order of their real-time popularity as measured by social impressions. For example, on a random Thursday night in the fall of 2011 (as this was being written), the top six most social shows according to SocialGuide were *The Big Bang Theory, The X Factor, The Vampire Diaries*, *Jersey Shore*, *Community*, and *Charlie's Angels*.

SocialGuide ingests information for 177 channels, accounting for all major

broadcast networks plus the most popular cable channels. Since the application knows whether or not a given user is a digital television subscriber, it will display only high-definition channel rankings where applicable. This makes it incredibly easy to scan the rankings, discover a show, and know exactly what channel it is on.

The app enables users to filter program listings by genre and includes "reality" as one of the options. This is particularly helpful given that reality competitions tend to naturally produce a good share of backchannel conversation and SocialGuide creates a simple path by which to find them. Other genre filters include Series, Movies, Sports, and News.

A toggle "talk bubble" toward the top right turns on, displaying the most recent tweet about each show in the SocialGuide listings. This gives users a rough sense as to the type of backchannel conversation that is taking place for each of the shows without having to drill down into the app.

Clicking any show listing pulls up the full Twitter backchannel conversation for the selected TV program. Though the tweet stream displays tweets from everyone by default, users can easily filter it to only display friends who are tweeting about the show or those just from the cast members of the given TV series. Since SocialGuide has preconfigured and mapped all of the Twitter accounts for television celebrities and athletes, using this feature is a fun way to follow an ever-increasing amount of celebrity live tweeting, as we illustrated in the previous chapter.

SocialGuide makes it very easy for its users to post into the backchannel by auto-filling the status update field with a TV series' official Twitter hashtag. The app's design embraces the ability to switch back and forth from one TV show's backchannel conversation to another. Not only is this helpful for those users who like to channel surf; having the backchannel as such an integral part of the app also gives SocialGuide users instant access to a real-time data source that can help them decide whether or not to tune in to a specific program.

Yap.TV Brings the Notion of a Social TV Guide to the iPad

In August of 2011, Yap.TV launched the third version of its social TV guide available for the iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad.[11] Touted as a "completely personalized TV show guide," the app also acts as a second screen experience that allows users to engage with content (such as polls) during a given show.

Yap.TV's iPad app has a stunning graphical user interface[12] that celebrates television through its simple and clean design. Its default display exhibits 20 shows in "guide view" that are rendered as large TV show art thumbnails, laid out five across and four down. Links for filtering toward the upper right corner

of the screen allow users to narrow the number of shows displayed by a particular genre. An elegant slider-based navigational system at the bottom of the display shuffles TV program titles by specified day of the week as well as time of day.

More filters in the upper left-hand corner include the ability to display the top 20 TV shows based on an algorithm that accounts for social impressions. In addition, users can navigate to their list of favorite shows, as well as their Yap.TV friends' favorite shows. For less visual users, a "lineup" button displays the program guide as a more traditional channel grid while still employing all of the same time-based filtering features and functions.

Clicking into any show at any point reveals a quadrant-like preview display of available content about the given show including related tweets, a "Live Chat" option, polls, and photos. The Twitter integration on the iPad version of Yap.TV is particularly interesting. When selected, a side-by-side split screen shows two different tweet streams, and all "Fan Tweets" appear on the active left-side window by default. Tweets from the show's actors and/or official show Twitter account are segregated into their own stream on the right side. When users click, this window is activated and flip-flops with the Fan Tweets windowpane.

Similar to other social TV guides, Yap.TV also personalizes its channel lineup based on each user's specified pay TV provider. The app also supports the ability to follow other Yap.TV users who can enter into live chats about a given TV show.[13] In addition, the option to choose favorite television shows acts as a bookmark-of-sorts that gives Yap.TV users quick access to the pages for their most beloved programs. Favorites also become a part of each Yap.TV user's profile, which helps to tell the rest of the Yap.TV community who they are and what they like.

BuddyTV Combines Recommendations with the Power of the Remote

In July of 2011, the BuddyTV Guide app launched as a "universal guide"[14] whose goal is to have people watching what they want in less than 20 seconds. In addition to serving as a television recommendations engine, the smartphone app also has remote control capabilities if paired with Google TV (a connected TV that we describe in Chapter 9), the TiVo Series 3 set-top box,[15] or the AT&T U-verse receiver.

BuddyTV's power lies primarily in its ability to constantly tune its recommendations over time based on the actions a given user takes within the app. These include tagging favorite shows by clicking a heart icon, rating shows on a one to five scale, and alerting BuddyTV to the fact that you have tuned in

to a particular show. The more actions that one takes within the app, the better its recommendations become.

Users also have the option of connecting their existing Facebook account into the app. This allows BuddyTV to ingest existing TV show "likes" as yet another input to its personalized suggestions, and lets users recommend TV shows to their Facebook friends. Additionally, BuddyTV users can easily post Facebook status updates about what they are watching, which further prompts social content discovery.

Because users specify their cable or satellite provider upon initial setup, BuddyTV's suggestions include US television listings, video on demand titles, and Netflix content when applicable. Recommendations are displayed using TV show art thumbnails and appear on the BuddyTV Guide's home screen under an "Airing Now" label. Users can easily swipe through the artwork to browse all of the suggestions that are currently airing on TV at the time they are using the app.

Appearing just below the Airing Now section are tabs that let BuddyTV users toggle between upcoming show recommendations as well as their favorites, most popular shows, and their personalized Watch List. Selecting a show from any of these groups provides details about the TV show's current or next episode airing. A user can also use this space to make the show a favorite and rate it, as well as post comments about the specific episode to their Twitter and/or Facebook profiles.

Additionally, an on/off switch button embedded within each show's profile page lets users add the given show to their BuddyTV Guide Watch List. Doing so sends push notifications prior to airings of the specified show, and increases its recommendations weighting. As a further means to ensure that users do not miss Watch List TV broadcasts, there is also an option that adds the show's airing day and time as an event within the user's default calendar on their smartphone or tablet device.

Fav.tv Focuses on the Before and After Part of the Television Experience

If you pick up a TV Guide *today, you'll probably struggle to find the pages where they have an actual guide of what's on television. Fav.tv is what* TV Guide *could have been had they just stayed true to their original solution of helping users find out what's on TV. As soon as you follow a show, fav.tv presents a customized guide that keeps viewers from having to flip through a bunch of* TV Guide *pages or go through a grid of 200 channels to figure out what's on tonight.*

A relative newcomer to the social TV guide space, fav.tv launched on September 13, 2011 with an extremely simple user interface packaged around five buttons. "Activity" is, essentially, the fav.tv newsfeed that shows the actions that a user and their fav.tv community have taken within the app.

The "Queue" is akin to a "to-do" list for TV episodes. It displays shows that the user has opted to watch that they can check off as complete while answering a simple yes/no question as to whether or not they enjoyed the episode. "What's On" is the actual program guide itself, which can filter shows by all, preferred, or featured. The fourth button, "Shows," lists users' favorite TV programs. Finally, "Messages" are communications sent to and received from other fav.tv users.

The basic building block of fav.tv is the act of following a TV show, which places that show into the user's favorites with an option to "pin" it onto the home screen for one-click access. Any given show page lists upcoming episodes and other helpful curated information—including a link to its profile on imdb.com. There is also a tab that lists all episodes (including past seasons) for that particular show.

According to CEO Saverio Mondelli, fav.tv was designed to address TV viewers' needs before and after watching a television show:

> *We have this philosophy that there are three important parts of TV. There's the before, during which you gather information to determine when a show is on and when and how you're going to watch it. Then there's the during, when you're actually watching the show. And then there's the after, where you have these random sporadic conversations—whether they be on Twitter or on Facebook or around the watercooler at work. Fav.tv focuses on the before and after.*

An "Activity" tab on each TV program's show page toggles the user to all related comments from other fav.tv users. This acts as the hub of the social conversation from fav.tv community members around a given program. Mondelli feels this is a particularly compelling feature to use after an episode airs:

> *The after is the "social" part of social TV. It's the part that our competitors are encouraging you to do during the show. We find that when you're watching TV, you don't want to be talking; you want to focus. A perfect example of this is a show like Lost. Everybody had theories about the show and every episode opened new mind-sets and new ideas about what could be going on. People want a forum to put those ideas out there, get validation from other users, and hear what everybody else thinks. That's what the after is: going back to the community that you've established for yourself. We've built fav.tv so that you can establish a main network of your friends, family and people whose opinions you actually care about.*

Fav.tv looks to differentiate itself from other social TV guides based on its simplicity and ease of use. A mere click of the "follow" button for a particular TV show is all of the user effort that it takes to engage in this platform. Fav.tv says that it handles the rest to ensure that its users will never miss out on another TV show again.

And the Story Comes Full-Circle to TV Guide

> *A challenge for consumers right now is that there are so many options and so many ways to watch . . . in some ways, it's overwhelming and difficult to manage. That is why TVGuide.com created our Watchlist product; we think there's an opportunity for us to help people manage what is a proliferation of content options, distribution methods, and delivery options for consumers.*
>
> *—Christy Tanner, Executive Vice President and General Manager at TVGuide.com*

TVGuide.com has managed to grow its visitor traffic close to eight times what it had back in 2006 through constant innovation and online product development. With over 23 million unique monthly users to its website, the TV Guide brand remains trusted and strong.

During the summer of 2011, the site launched two products that upped the ante in the social TV guide space. TV Guide's Watchlist officially emerged in August of 2011 as a highly personalized, relevant, and social way to discover, plan, and track television shows. One month later, in September of 2011, TVGuide.com launched its Social Power Rankings product, which lists the most popular television shows based on activity that happens directly on TVGuide.com.

Within a month of its unveiling, TVGuide.com users had created over 375,000 Watchlists. Users can add shows, celebrities, and even sports teams to create their custom Watchlist, which allows them to see upcoming broadcast airings and watch the latest episode online (where applicable). With television consumption on the rise, the Watchlist is a helpful planning tool—as TVGuide.com EVP and General Manager Christy Tanner states:

> *Every year, we ask people how many hours of TV are they going to watch. The percentage of people in our survey who said they are going to watch more than 30 hours of television a week went up this year to 32 percent from 28 percent last year. So more people are watching more hours of TV than ever before . . . because there are more and better options and so many ways to watch. If your goal is to just keep on watching more TV, the Watchlist can help you manage, with precision, the number of shows you*

can jam into a single day.

TVGuide.com includes an option to view Watchlists created by celebrities, which is yet another compelling and intriguing way to discover new content. The top 10 Social Power Rankings are tabulated from TVGuide.com's usage data that includes check-ins, user comments, episode discussions, and Facebook and Twitter posts initiated from the site. The rankings are not updated in real-time; instead, TVGuide.com's editorial staff calculates and curates them. On this particular day, the top three shows within the Social Power Rankings are *All My Children* (due to the series finale), *Pan Am*, and *The X Factor*. An "add to watchlist" button appears next to each of the rankings, thus closing the content discovery loop from intrigue to action.

The Quest to Drive Tune-in

When the DVR came along, people said that it was basically going to kill television. It actually made people watch more because it made them watch smarter. Just wait until social TV guides can accurately recommend what people will want to watch. You'll see people consuming more content in a smarter way and they'll be more likely to share that content—which then feeds the whole system.

—Cory Bergman, Lost Remote Founder

All of the players in the social TV guide space have potential access to the same source data that powers their applications through license deals, partnerships, and programming interfaces. The guides that end up succeeding will be the ones who best weave together and manipulate that data into an extremely useful experience tied to a simple, elegant, and engaging user interface.

What makes each platform unique are their algorithms and user experience. At the end of the day, all have the same goal in helping people to find television shows to watch. But the best "algorithm" is actually one's friends, which is why social media will continue to grow as a trusted source for content discovery.

On September 22, 2011, Facebook announced a number of big changes to its platform at its annual F8 developer conference. Among the changes is an evolution of Facebook's "like" button to include other verbs such as "watch."[16] This represents a new level of focus around television show recommendations that leverages one's social graph to drive tune-in using trusted sources: your friends.