



Syfy Turns to Fans to Create Network IDs

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When it comes to creating IDs for its network, Syfy has been turning to fans to create short, fun spots, and just debuted five Halloween-themed animations from artists around the world.

"There's a lot of talent out there," said Jeffrey Blackman, Syfy senior vice president of creative.

The network has been partnering with crowd-sourcing online studio Tongal to gather pitches for ID assignments, and then commissioning artists to execute what has been an eclectic nod to Syfy's 2017 rebrand to position itself as more of a science-fiction hub.

"We are trying to move ourselves from just a place to watch TV shows, to being an important brand in any genre fan's media consumption diet," said Blackman.

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From fan fiction and art, to robotics, paintings and cosplay, the rebrand highlighted that "if we're going to be an authentic fan service brand, we need to recognize there is a huge community of makers," Blackman said.

"We looked at this pretty authentic fan behavior and we wanted to reflect that," he said. "We wanted to salute these folks and give them a platform to recognize and celebrate them and bring them closer to our brand."

While the concept of using fan art for marketing and promotion purposes has been an ongoing project, the ident-specific initiative launched in July at the 2018 San Diego Comic-Con with a more officially monthly cadence.

Spots by fans have been running on-air and across social media since August, and the Halloween-themed idents hold a special place for the horror-specific portion of the sci-fi genre.

In determining which content to choose, Tongal narrowed the field down to about 20 pitches—often in the form of well-developed storyboards. Syfy chose their top five favorites, looking for "a level of charm you weren't expecting," and commissioned the artists to bring the pieces to life. Creators for the Halloween idents include Desiree Lavoy, Richard Mather, Henry Smith and Chris George, Jeff Gill, and the fan team at Pangur Animation.

"The real add-on here is not only are we showing their art, we're essentially letting the creators sign it, and attributing it to individual artists," Blackman said.

Working with Tongal's large community also allows Syfy to cast a wide net for the initiative, and showcase a diverse range of global artists working in many different styles and techniques. The only real rule is they have to incorporate Syfy's logo.

"Some are very visual based; some are kind of silly and a little homegrown, and we like that," said Blackman.

Turning its IDs over to its fans also means giving them a degree of creative freedom.

"We treat them with a lighter touch than we do most of our other promotional creative," said Blackman. "To be authentic, we want them to tell us what they want to make, and then have them make it,"

While the assignment this month was focused on Halloween, assignments are more open for months that don't have obvious themes.

Syfy also ties the initiative to its content. For instance, the January assignment has a magic theme to promote the return of its series *The Magicians*.

And while the Halloween versions will obviously have a pretty short shelf life, Syfy will slide around the more general ones and filter in new ones.

In the end, having content you don't want to part with is a good problem to have, said Blackman.