This New DIY Streaming Platform Brings LGBTQ Programming Direct to the Community

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Key Insights:

- Femme Power TV's creator says there's a missing pipeline between LGBTQ film festivals and big streaming contracts.

Each year, close to $20 billion passes hands during TV upfronts, when advertisers negotiate airtime with networks. Although upfronts spending is down by a third during the pandemic, it's still what enables networks to fund production (among other costs), bringing fresh new programming to the masses. For digital streaming, this year's spending is still unclear, as the IAB's 2020 Digital Content NewFronts event has been postponed until late June.

But regardless of platform, it's likely few of those dollars will go to shows about trans women of color or about queer sex workers. When a show like Pose gets a deal with a network like FX, it's the exception rather than the rule. Many LGBTQ creators are familiar with feeling locked out of the industry; the edgiest and most authentic queer films and shows tend to run through LGBTQ film festivals and then disappear without ever finding broadcast exposure or big-name streaming deals.

Filmmaker Heather María Ács is no stranger to the queer film festival circuit. Her short film Flu$h (co-produced by Pose and Transparent director Silas Howard) toured festivals starting in 2018, screening before audiences that largely

could relate to the film’s scrappy band of kinky, sex worker queer punks.

As Ács began to explore moving into episodic content, she tired of watching quality shorts so frequently die the post-festival death. Instead of asking why this or that amazing show never got picked up by a streaming platform, Ács decided to tap into her DIY punk background and simply start a streaming site of her own. With little money and no advertisers whatsoever, her new online platform for independent LGBTQ content, Femme Power TV, launches on Sunday—free to viewers everywhere.

“Basically, the only way to see this work is to go to a film festival. And if you’re not someone who goes to film festivals, then you’re not getting to see this work,” said Ács. “There’s actually a lot of representation out there. The audiences, though, don’t have access to it.”

Heather María Ács
Femme Power Productions
It’s not that Hollywood isn’t interested in LGBTQ stories, said Ács—far from it. But somewhere between the film festivals and the contracts with Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon, there’s a pipeline missing. Ács hopes that new streamer Femme Power TV (FPTV for short) will help serve as a stepping stone that brings wider exposure to queer film festival faves.

“Marginalized stories/characters have received new levels of attention, and there has been an unprecedented clamor for trans and queer actors. However, Hollywood’s curiosity does not guarantee that our stories will be told with respect, accuracy, or care,” said Ács. “It is imperative that we control our own narratives, gain access to the resources

necessary to tell our stories, and expand currently available platforms to reach queer audiences and beyond."

Femme Power TV's initial lineup of just seven programs—marketed as 'Queerantine'—is impressive for a completely bootstrapped project that's available free of charge to viewers. Among the streaming web series options is Mercy Mistress, a Margaret Cho-produced pilot about a Chinese-American dominatrix that stars Poppy Liu of NBC's Sunnyside. Another episodic delight is Femme Queen Chronicles, a Sex in The City-like take on the lives of four black trans women living and dating in Detroit, supported by the Sundance Institute.

Shorts, documentaries, and even art films are streaming on FPTV too; from a short version of the forthcoming doc about the life of trans ACT UP activist Connie Norman to artist Dorian Wood's "immersive fever dream that celebrates the beauty of queer brown sensuality, body positivity and individuality." For now, FPTV is entirely native to its website; it's not available on devices like Apple TV or Roku.

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