

A new adventure for CMT

Cable net orders two series, aims to develop pair of sitcoms for 2010

By James Hibberd

LOS ANGELES — CMT wants to bring back the traditional family sitcom — and add a few gators.

The Viacom-owned network has ordered two series to launch an action block and hired comedy executive Brad Johnson to oversee an expansion into scripted programming. The network intends to develop about a dozen comedy scripts with an eye toward having two sitcoms on the air next year.

But first, coming in the second quarter are ITV's "Danger Coast" and 12 Forward's "Gator 911" (working titles).

"We did a lot of research looking at what reality programming our audience watched on other networks, and adventure shows kept popping up near the top of the list," said Mary Beth Cunin, senior vp programming strategy at CMT.

"Coast" follows Miami's elite Marine Operations Bureau as they protect the public. "Gator" follows Gary Suarage, owner of Texas-based adventure park Gator Country, as he and his team rescue



Johnson

wandering gators. Both half-hours received 10-episode orders.

"These shows have a mixture of adventure and fun and perfectly fit our filter," said Bob

Kusbit, head of development at the network. " 'Danger Coast' has beautiful-looking water, but these people truly lay their lives on the line. 'Gator 911' has colorful characters, but at the heart of it they're saving gators."

Built on music video programming, CMT has followed the VH1 model of gradually expanding into reality shows and specials. The network boasts that 2009 will be

its ninth consecutive year of year-over-year primetime growth among adults 18-49, with break-outs including its country revamp of former NBC title "The Singing Bee" and its reality show "World's Strictest Parents."

CMT's audience research has shown the network's viewership is fairly broad (and evenly split between men and women), which supports expanding into more general programming; music, comedy, adventure and family are the genres that executives said best suit the network.

Johnson has assumed the newly created position of senior vp comedy development. A former Fox executive, he developed "The Simple Life," "American Dad" and "Arrested Development" and served as a showrunner on the long-running sitcom "Coach." Three of the shows Johnson developed earned writing Emmys. **THR**