

CHEF BOURDAIN TO SPICE UP CNN WITH NEW TRAVEL SHOW



CNN may be facing some difficult times with its TV ratings, but by adding the charismatic Anthony Bourdain to their mix, they are on to ensuring that he spices up the network, just as he spices up his dishes. The abrasive chef has a tendency to get noticed. He has rugged handsome features; a deep voice that commands attention, he is masculine but not pompous, wicked without being vulgar. Even though CNN still makes a considerable amount of money, this year's profits are estimated at \$600 million, what is bugging the company is that it is losing out to its competition and recorded its lowest ratings over the decade in April. Nothing seems to be working for the channel, neither the elections, nor the firm edicts from Time Warner management nor the new replacement, Piers Morgan for the iconic Larry King. The channel is hoping, that given the Mr. Bourdain's current program, 'No Reservations' draws about 450,000 viewers, its stalled viewership needle could show some upward movement again. Anthony Bourdain is no television lightweight. He and his production company, have many numerous accolades and awards for their shows, including Emmys for programs on Haiti and Laos. Mark Whitaker, managing editor of CNN Worldwide, realizing that CNN's almost total dependence on politics saw competing channels like Fox and MSNBC surge ahead, decided to change the viewership menu. He made a deliberate attempt to lessen politics and commence other public interest programs. He began to contact Mr. Bourdain way back in March. His choice was based on two things. Mr. Bourdain liked to travel to far flung places and that fit in with CNN's international image. More than that, Bourdain would come with a ready-made audience. The program, they felt, would give its audience something to continue their loyalty, when political news was not so hot. Over the phone, Mr. Whitaker said, "Tony is appointment viewing and sticky in a way that we need to be. We are big fans of what he does and what he stands for, which is global and smart, but he goes beyond politics and war coverage. We need to be broader than that and we are looking hard to make that happen. Tony was the first person that came to mind." Mr. Bourdain became an instant hit with the public with his book "Kitchen Confidential," that gave salacious and scandalous insides of the chaos and confusion that took place in the finer hotels of Manhattan. He soon outgrew his bad boy image and became known as a chef who was more interested in the humans behind the recipes than the recipe itself. He rubbed many of his fellow chefs the wrong way, by saying hurtful things about chefs, who behave like divas or rock stars. Mr. Bourdain was happy with his current job and not really desperate to change it. How much better can it get, than to have a job that allows you to traverse the earth and eat your way through it. But he says that he is happy at the new job. "I have had an excellent relationship with the Travel Channel, but CNN is a big company with a lot of international juice," he said. "Some of the shows that I make in distant countries will be shown in those same countries. I'd like to do a show that goes up Congo River, or get back to Libya. CNN has the resources and know-how to help make that happen." Mr. Bourdain graduated from the Culinary Institute of America and his work eventually led him to becoming the executive chef at Brasserie Les Halles. Youthful indiscretion saw him trying out a lot of illicit drugs. However, when he got a job in the television industry, he took his job seriously. Viewers of his immensely popular program will have noticed that he has a penchant for describing the human anatomy unreservedly, especially if the food item resembles male genitals. He is also game to eating the most absurd food and can easily snack on a raw seal eye ball. He is a prolific author and has 10 books, both fiction and non-fiction to his credit. He is a regular contributor to many magazines. He works really hard and is a natural in front of the camera. "When you are described as 'talent' on a set, it's not generally meant as a compliment," he said. Reacting to CNN's announcement on Tuesday that they would be making a, yet to be named travel show with him, to be telecast on weekends, he said, "Eleven years ago, I was standing by a deep fryer. I was surprised and flattered that a news organization was interested in doing a show with me." Given his track record, there is little doubt that his luck will rub on to the fortunes of CNN.