

## Tracey Edmonds Takes You to 'Vurch'

**She tells us about her new digital channel, which offers virtual church from mega-pastors.**

By: Genetta M. Adams | Posted: March 30, 2013 at 12:19 AM



Tracey Edmonds (Frederick M. Brown/Getty Images)

*(The Root)* -- With 20 years of experience behind her, Tracey E. Edmonds knows a thing or two about creating successful TV shows and films. In the '90s, she and former husband Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds launched the Edmonds Entertainment Group, which produced *Soul Food* in 1997. As president of Our Films, she released 2011's *Jumping the Broom*, a film about love and marriage set in Martha's Vineyard. She was also the executive producer of the successful reality-TV show *College Hill* on BET.

Now the award-winning entertainment mogul is taking her vast TV and film experience into the digital realm as president and chief executive officer of Alright TV, a YouTube channel dedicated to faith-friendly and inspirational shows that launches on March 31, Easter Sunday.

In addition to presenting a full complement of lifestyle shows focused on health, relationships and family, the channel will showcase work by some top talent: Vanessa Middleton, a co-executive producer for *The Cosby Show*, is writing and directing the Web series *Walk This Way*, which stars Michael K. Williams, better known as Omar Little from *The Wire*, and Chalky White from *Boardwalk Empire*. Issa Rae, the force behind popular Web series *Awkward Black Girl*, is creating a comedy about the inner workings of a church choir.

Edmonds, who developed Alright TV with BET founder Robert L. Johnson, talked to *The Root* about the challenges of producing for the Web, reaching across the digital divide and an innovative idea called "vurch."

**The Root:** How did you get involved with producing an Internet network?

**Tracey Edmonds:** The idea for Alright TV kind of started from a couple different levels. One is, I'm actually very active on social networking. I really decided to use Twitter for positivity and to help inspire people, and so when I started my Twitter page, I would tweet out these inspirational messages in the morning. The feedback I started immediately getting was, "Thank you so much for your message. It really helped me through my day," to other people tweeting me inspirational messages to help keep me lifted.

That was one of the things that gave me the idea that people really need to be empowered and need positivity in their lives. Then I had a really wonderful experience working on the film *Jumping the Broom*. That was a faith-friendly film, but one where we still went for high entertainment value.

We didn't want to beat people over the head with a message. The idea was to create this digital channel that would really help inspire and uplift people and make people feel good, but at the same time really go for high entertainment value.

**TR:** What are some of the challenges of producing for the Internet versus film or television?

**TE:** The budget you have to work with producing a digital series is just a small fraction of what you've been used to for television content or feature-film content. So you have to adjust your approach to production when you're producing for digital. The budgets are much less; you have to figure out a way to produce an entire cycle of a [Web] series over the course of two or three days. But I've done independent films before and I've done reality shows on pennies, so you adapt what you've learned along those ways and kind of apply it toward this.

**TR:** You were tweeting about being on the set of *Walk This Way*, which stars Michael K. Williams. How does it look so far?

**TE:** I love all of our shows, but that's going to be a really fun show for us. We're so blessed to have someone of Michael K. Williams' talent play our lead. He plays Pastor Daniels, who, each week, we get a chance to see counsel various parishioners on different problems that they're going through in their lives. And the fun part is, this a comedy, so we get a chance to see people come in with some crazy problems and see the advice that he gives them.

We've also been having a lot of fun casting our guest stars. Every week our viewers will tune in and see a well-known face walking into the office. We'll have some surprises like, "Oh, my God, I can't believe they got someone to do this."

**TR:** You also have Issa Rae doing a show. How did you come to collaborate with her?

**TE:** I'm a huge fan of Issa, and I was really fortunate that one of our executives has a relationship with Issa and her partner and was able to have her come in. She pitched us a faith-friendly concept called *The Choir*. It's a comedy, and it's about the personal, spiritual and controversial dynamics of a church choir and all the politics that go on behind the scenes, the friendships and relationship issues -- so, the inner workings of a choir.

**TR:** Speaking of church, you're also doing this thing called "vurch."

**TE:** We can say the "v" stands for either "video church" or "virtual church." The reality is, busy people don't have a chance to attend church services as often as they would often really like. But I know a lot of busy people still want to hear the word. So the idea is that Alright TV will bring church to you.

We're going to be live-streaming weekly church services from pastors from all over the country. This will be the first time any website will have ever done this, so we're really revolutionizing church services in a way because we're going to be expanding their outreach nationally and globally.

If you're at home or you're at work or if you're at the airport, you can log on to Alright TV and go into vurch. You can search by the church name, the pastor's name, or even go to a map of the country and look at states and cities and see the church's logo and click on it. Or, if you missed you it, we'll be archiving the service.

**TR:** There's a study that says there's still a bit of a digital divide with African Americans having less access to broadband at home. Are you worried about not fully reaching your target audience?

**TE:** One of the things we're doing is going inside the church community and really doing outreach through the churches and encouraging and engaging them into coming on board with what's going on with the Internet and digital programming. We're really doing a lot of grassroots outreach to our African-American community to open that door and let them know we're out here and we're launching.

*Genetta M. Adams is a contributing editor of **The Root**. Follow her on Twitter.*

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