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## ‘Ink Master’ Celebrates 100 Episodes: How The Spike Reality TV Series Got Started And Is Continuing To Grow

BY AMANDA REMLING @AMANDATVSCOOP ON 10/11/16 AT 1:25 PM

If you’re a tattoo lover, odds are that you’re glued to your TV on Tuesdays for Spike’s “Tattoosday.” New episodes of the hit reality series “Ink Master” air at 10 p.m., followed by new installments of its spinoff series, “Ink Master: Redemption.” “Ink Master” has become one of Spike’s strongest shows to help them successfully shift to a general entertainment network, and on Tuesday night the series hits a big milestone — 100 episodes.

“Ink Master” first premiered on Spike on January 17, 2012. Now in its eighth season, the series is pulling in its strongest ratings yet, ranking number one in ad-supported cable networks among men 18-49 and number two in women 18-49 during its timeslot. One hundred episodes deep, the show has no plans on slowing down and a ninth season has already picked up. But, surprisingly, the show almost didn’t land on Spike.

“It was a very interesting beginning because I met with Charlie Corwin, who at the time owned and ran Original Media, and we had a meeting in New York,” Sharon Levy, Spike’s executive vice president of original series, reminisces to International Business Times. “I remember being in some temporary office and I said, ‘Well, what else do you have?’ He was pitching a lot of shows, and he said, ‘You know, I have this tattoo idea, but I didn’t really think that Spike would be into that.’ Charlie outlined the vision of the show, which at the time was kind of conceived as a stand alone, and he and I decided together that the way to do this was to make it a competitive arc kind of competition. It was a little scary ... If they don’t do well it’s a bigger loss, but that was the right way to do the show. And then he delivered Dave Navarro to the mix, and we were off to the races.”

Dave Navarro, along with fellow judges Oliver Peck and Chris Núñez, all bring a little something different to the table. As showrunner and executive producer Andrea Richter explains to IBT, Peck signed on as more of the “creative judge,” while Núñez came on board to judge on the “technical side.” Navarro brought the viewpoint as a canvas. “It was looking for the right people who filled those three spots so that there could be a different reason for each judge,” says Richter. “Clearly they came together and that chemistry worked well.”

And the chemistry isn't TV magic. Peck and Núñez have been friends for over 20 years, and have developed a strong friendship with Navarro.

"I was pretty excited that Dave was going to be on the show because I'm a huge Jane's Addiction fan," Peck tells IBT about first meeting his co-star. "But literally the first day on set that we met, we pretty much instantly became friends and have been great friends ever since."

Admittedly, their tight-knit friendship can get in the way of filming.

"The problem is that me, Chris and Dave are all such good friends that we have to try to separate that to be separate judges, and sometimes we have to take step back and do it again just for the show's sake," Peck explains. "We need to be a little bit more harsh. We get to having fun and joking around, and just because we're so used to it and, we're having a good time, that we have to kind of stop and start over because we have to get our game face on to be in the moment."



But the on-screen chemistry isn't the only thing that has viewers tuning into "Ink Master" week-after-week. The artwork from the talented tattoo artists has people lining up to appear as human canvases on the show.

According to Richter, the "view and goal" of the show was to have amazing artwork. "I think that's what set 'Ink Master' apart from other competition shows," says Richter. "We tried to give these artists everything they could possibly need to succeed while still having a compelling game. Six-hour tattoos give you a good size. 'LA Ink' and 'Miami Ink' paved the way seeing great tattoos, and you didn't want to lose that once you got into a competition setting."

With that said, there has certainly been some less than stellar tattoos that have come out

of the show. That's where the "Redemption" spinoff series comes into play. Executive producer Glenda Hersh, who is also the co-president and co-CEO at Original Media, the production company behind "Ink Master," tells IBT that the idea for "Redemption" came about from the thinking: "What happens when everyone goes home? What were they really thinking?"

"I think we all wonder about what happened to the canvases that weren't happy," Hersh says of expanding the "Ink Master" franchise. "That was something we always wondered about, and it seemed like the perfect fit for a way to take another step inside the competition and kind of adjacent to the competition."

And Hersh has no plans on stopping there either. With the success of the spinoff and 100-episode milestone, Hersh says that they are "always thinking about how we take viewers on another journey inside the 'Ink Master' universe."

"We have things simmering on the stove as we speak," she teases.

Fortunately for fans, Peck is on board for future seasons.

"I'm here for the long ride," he tells IBT. "I'll do this for as long as it keeps going. It's a lot of fun. I love seeing the artists, I love getting to know their work, I love giving people honest critiques, and I love seeing the twists and the turns that come into the competition. It's literally gotten better and better every season."

Spike seems ready to continue investing in the future of "Ink Master" as well.

"I would like to say that 'Ink Master' will be on forever," says Levy. "I can't read the tea leaves, but we're very excited about season nine. The plot is top secret, as you know we always do. There is always room for spinoffs because we just love taking the franchise in different directions."

"This show has been a cornerstone for us in helping bring women to the channel. I think it's been a great season so far and any reality show that can go up in its eighth season is a testament to all the hardworking people who make the show."

*"Ink Master" Season 8 airs on Spike on Tuesdays at 10 p.m. ET. Catch the 100th episode on Tuesday, Oct. 11 at 10 p.m. ET.*

