



Online Sundance festival showcases Net films

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PARK CITY, Utah (CNN) -- Eighteen independent Web-based films hit computer screens this week during the launch of the first Sundance Online Film Festival.

The digital version of the celebrated Sundance Film Festival showcases films created and developed exclusively for the Internet. The films will be featured online at www.sundanceonlinefilmfestival.org for a month longer than the annual offline event, which takes place from January 18-28.

"You'll see something that is so unique and stuff that you have never seen before in traditional theaters and even in the traditional shorts world," said R.J. Millard, press officer for the Sundance Film Festival.

Artists from around the world submitted films narrowed down to three categories: animation, live-action and interactive. The short form content ranges from just two to 15 minutes long, but some filmmakers say that's part of the challenge.

"Online storytelling simply has to be really focused, and it has to be reduced to very simple components simply because there is not very much physical space to see it," said filmmaker Erik Aldigard.

Perhaps one of the most innovative ways for traditional filmmakers to experiment is in cyberspace since interactive works allow viewers to choose their own path.

"One of the exciting things for me was the possibility, with the click of the mouse, to move in between films," said filmmaker Nina Menkes. "You can move through it in multiple ways, so I was able to experience my own work in a whole new way."

The digital film revolution broadens opportunities for both the filmmakers and the audience. It also provides a unique opportunity for direct audience feedback; many filmmakers' bios on the festival's Web site include e-mail addresses.

"New technology makes it possible for more people to tell their story and that, of course, is the history of the movies," said Nick DeMartino, associate director of the American Film Institute.