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MIPCOM 2012: Kevin Spacey, Robin Wright: Why Netflix's 'House of Cards' Is the Future of TV

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Seller Sony Pictures screened the first two episodes of the \$100 million political drama for buyers at MIPCOM Sunday night.

CANNES – If its pitchmen are to be believed, *House of Cards*, the first drama series commissioned by VOD service Netflix, is the future of TV.

Kevin Spacey and **Robin Wright**, who star in the modern-day political drama, flew into Cannes to hype the series, which Media Rights Capital is producing and Sony Pictures Television is selling worldwide. Sony screened the first two episodes of *House of Cards* to international buyers. Netflix will put all 13 episodes of the first season online at once in February.

With a budget north of \$100 million for the two, 13-episode seasons commissioned by Netflix and with **David Fincher** on board as an executive producer – and director of the first two episodes – *House of Cards* has the potential to either be a game changer for the VOD business

or a costly mistake for Netflix and its partners. The series is based on a BBC show of the same name from the 1990s which starred **Ian Richardson** as an ambitious and ruthless British politician.

“This is a really new perspective...to drop them all at once but I think that’s how we watch TV now,” Spacey said.

“This is the future, streaming is the future,” said **Beau Willimon**, the Oscar-nominated screenwriter of *Ides of March* who adapted the original BBC series and acts as headwriter and showrunner on *House of Cards*. “TV will not be TV in five years from now...everyone will be streaming.”

Spacey, speaking to reporters ahead of the industry screening, said Netflix gave he and the other series creators (Spacey has an executive producer credit on *House of Cards*) complete creative freedom making the show.

“Because this is the first time they (Netflix) are doing drama, they don’t even have the offices to do this compared with the other networks,” Spacey said. “I feel sorry for the makers of the third series they do – when they have the offices (and can interfere).”

Willimon said Netflix didn’t interfere “in any way” with his or Fincher’s vision for the series.

“They didn’t give notes, like you’d see in other series. They trusted us to deliver, creatively,” he told *THR*.

Willimon and Spacey were loath to divulge much of the plot of the series but Willimon did confirm that Spacey’s character, Francis Underwood, the Conservative politician Francis Urquhart in the BBC version, would be the Democratic Chief Whip in the U.S. incarnation. The American series kicks off just after the 2012 election when Urquhart is snubbed for a key post in the new administration and decides to seize power himself by any means necessary.

Spacey and Wright said it was the creative freedom that drew them back to TV.

“I was lucky to get into film at a time (the 1990s) that was very interesting for drama,” Spacey said. “But if you look now, the focus is not on the same kind of films that were made in the 90s. When I look now, the most interesting plots, the most interesting characters, they are on TV.”

“Everything now is escapism, because that’s where the money is,” said Wright. “There is a vacuum for serious drama. The mid-budget serious drama is something you don’t experience anymore.”

Spacey argued that Netflix’s approach to the series – commissioning 26 episodes upfront without first screening a pilot – will give *House of Cards* greater continuity. “We know exactly where we are going,” he said.

Joshua Donen, Eric Roth, Dana Brunetti, Andrew Davies, Michael Dobbs and **John Melfi** will also have executive producer credits on *House of Cards*, which Donen/Fincher/Roth and Trigger Street Productions are co-producing in association with Media Rights Capital. The first season will wrap production later this month. Season two is set to begin shooting in the Spring of 2013.



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