

CTAM in Philadelphia:

Great Programming, Great Technology

Poor Vision

The cable industry has not adjusted well to the “First Mile” world of portable video

By Mike Kashmer ■ *Broadband Properties*

I am finally able to reflect on all the programming and marketing information I was exposed to at this year’s CTAM event in Philadelphia. Besides the extreme temperature and now extreme, soon to be mainstream, networks and platforms, I can’t help but think about prior CTAMs. This was my twentieth CTAM or so. Think about the incredible leap television, in this case cable television, has made in that time. The late 1970s showcased new video platforms as the future. Broadcast was on the ropes, cable was the new technology and it was touted to be with us well into the future. Or so it seemed back then.

“I want my MTV” resonated through and terrified the traditional, staid broadcast world. No one had ever experienced anything like this. All of a sudden we had pro-active, innocent interactive, television.

Multiple System Operators (MSO’s) were forced to pay attention to this phenomenon started by the fledgling cable networks. HBO and MTV started the avalanche but many other nets went along for the ride. It was inevitable.

And it paid off in spades. Finally consumers had someone who listened to what they wanted to see on TV. Finally. Pay TV, dominated by HBO right from the start, became a

powerhouse and in a few short years was recognized as a serious revenue stream for cable operators just as it was meant to be.

Remember When Pay TV was a Joke?

Before that all bets were off as to whether or not HBO would ever be a business. In the early 1970s pay TV was a bad joke. The technology just wasn’t there. Companies like Optical Systems tried and failed at the fledgling pay TV model. Pay TV was sold like 1950s-style appliances with a little box behind the TV that you would drop coins into just to keep it running. People said, pay TV - pay for what? Pay for what everyone was already getting for free? Funny how a few decades can totally change a “free” perception as strongly rooted as this one once was.

What do Consumers Want?

It was with great anticipation that I walked into the Philadelphia Convention Center, partly to escape the ferocious heat, but mainly to see cool and exciting developments. I was not disappointed.

After all is said and done, all cool presentations made, all opinions heard, what is it that consumers are really interested in? Each of us, as we all know firsthand, have only

so much time to spend on anything – relationships, raising our children, careers, cutting the grass. Things large and small take up so much of our time.

What is our dependable, always faithful TV to do? If it could talk, our TV would say “Why can’t it stay just like it always was? How can I just sit here while you are watching your favorite programs on your cell phone or computer?”

“I’ve always been there for you, plus I’ve upgraded with all the good stuff. Like a really cool plasma monitor, I’ve got HD and VOD down cold, a sound system. Forget it, this is the best. All the bells and whistles on the market. After all my patience, after all those years of service, you’re watching TV on your cell phone? Or you’re watching TV on your dumb computer over there in the corner? I thought that was just to buy books on Amazon.com! What about me?”

Well, time moves on. Even faithful appliances can be replaced, although none may be as personal as our own TV monitor. Your well-worn, dependable TV need not be assigned duty in the guest room when your mother-in-law comes to visit just yet. Options abound, all friendlier, more informative, all offering a complete range of interactive TV experiences. Tell your favorite TV that its days are

not over; it's just that you need to be able to move around more and you can't lug a TV with you. And your TV will share the expanding video experience with your computer and cell phone.

Thus, it seems as though the CTAM folks are well behind the curve on broadband in general and mobile/WiFi in particular. This is where the FTTH guys have a chance to excel and beat Comcast and the other MSOs at their own game.

Next month we will talk about dressing up your lineup with the right accents. "Bring on the Bling." **BBP**

About the Author

Mike Kashmer is director of new business development at Broadband Properties. Mike's long resume in cable and broadcast includes five years living in Japan. He can be reached via email at mike@broadbandproperties.com.

Spanish Language Programming Update

Last month's issue dealt with Hispanic programming and how viewership has exploded in the last few years. Major markets are particularly affected and a new kind of competition is emerging. English and Spanish-language broadcast television stations are scrambling for the same ad dollars. Right now this competition to mainstream is centered on the broadcast stations but can the cable equivalent be far behind? The growth of the Spanish-language audience is coveted by English and Spanish-language television networks. Latino viewers are increasingly switching back and forth between the two languages, especially in the news category. More to come as this ethnic media phenomenon evolves.



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