

Changes on the Horizon in 2006

Technology has opened a direct Internet pathway to consumers, bypassing cable

By Michael A. Kashmer ■ *Broadband Properties Magazine*

My last article of 2005 (BBP, December) summarized some of the monumental changes that took place in the last few months of last year. The new year will show which of these mega-deals and technology deployments will be successful and which will be relegated to the dustbin of broadband programming history.

Let's see what's cooking for 2006.

Phone Home to the Network

The leap to mobile phones will continue at a breakneck pace. Mobiles are not only the most portable but also the most personal devices consumers have today. Consumers carry them everywhere, and every member of the family can have at least one. There are more than 200 million nationwide and 2 billion worldwide. Traditional TV's are stuck in the house but cells are constantly on the go.

Mobile phone applications continue to proliferate. If you want to see the "latest" just stop by any of your local cell phone stores, which stand on as many corners as Starbucks.

Streaming video has been in development for a while but now we are talking about serious streaming of higher quality video provided by all the major cable and broadcasting players. Every week there is a fresh announcement from a major content supplier to supply a mobile portal. Mobile screens are small, but consumers can attach a new generation of inexpensive "video eye-wear" that fools the eye into thinking it is seeing a 40-inch screen.

This on-the-go market segment will adopt the idea of video content on mobile devices faster than any other kind of new media platform.

Of course, this will fragment an already drastically fragmented video business. Some years ago a wise pundit said that it "wasn't going to be your

father's TV any longer." How that has come true!

Other Video Programming Announcements

Bravo announced that it plans to produce a new docu-soap reality series and launch a pair of broadband channels based on its former cable property Trio. A six-episode, one-hour series, "Work Out" is set in an upscale fitness club. It will premiere in the third quarter. The broadband channels are at triotv.com, which will carry original and exclusive content from the Trio brand. The programming is love-it-or-leave-it, like Trio's nearly cult-following but cancelled broadcast programs. Action was my favorite show! Triotv.com launched in January. See what it has to offer.

ESPN has taken an innovative turn on its flagship network by offering an original movie on sister net ABC. ESPN itself is certainly not a vehicle for such a venture, but a decent film on ABC may drive viewers to ESPN, and vice versa. The movie is "Ruffian," based on the true story of a racehorse; it should play well. It will air in conjunction with ABC's airing of the Belmont Stakes in June. Four days after the premier of "Ruffian" on ABC, the flick will run on ESPN, ESPN's broadband channel ESPN360 and ESPN HD. Now, there is an excellent example of crossover for you.

Some of the biggest names in technology and content are striving to make it easier to watch the multitude of movies, TV programs and other video content that have been surfacing on Google, movie Web site MovieLink and some other Internet sites.

For consumers it may mean a chance to access virtually unlimited content – things like foreign-language movies, niche sports, local events and archived favorite TV shows like "Gunsmoke."

Uh-oh. Is this another competitor to cable and satellite companies? You bet it is. Vendors have been testing ways to get programming directly to consumers via the Internet without going through a host of industry middlemen.

Technology

The Las Vegas Consumer Electronics Show displayed devices that are already available to consumers. Intel's Viiv technology allows viewers to watch select Internet content on their TVs. Dell and Sony sell computers with this new technology. Viiv's content includes programming from ESPN, MTV, America Online and NBC. This diversity of content should make it broadband enough to attract a crossover audience.

Technical obstacles remain to close this gap between our TV and the computer in the other room. Internet connections have a way to go. It is still too slow to effectively stream hi-def content to TV. There is certainly a problem connecting computers and TV sets especially since the providers are not in the business of offering an easy connect.

Indie Cable Programmers Unite!

A group of independent programming networks announced the formation of a new trade association, the Association of Independent Programming Networks (AIPN) to promote the business, legislative and regulatory interests of independently owned video channels. Seven nets have joined to date including founding members The Tennis Channel, Mid-Atlantic Sports Network, ImaginAsian TV and The America Channel. Contact info is Anil Srivatsa at iatv (212) 869-4288 ext. 2004. **BBP**

About the Author

Mike Kashmer can be reached at mike@broadbandproperties.com.