

## Niche Programming:

# Slivercast TV

There's a market for narrow-audience video on the Web, even if not full-screen

By Michael A. Kashmer ■ *Broadband Properties*

Internet TV continues to add features and programs that are truly innovative and that greatly expand our viewing options. We all recall the predictions in the 1980s about cable television becoming a newsstand for dozens and dozens of channels aimed at niche audiences.

Well, on the cable TV front that has already happened. There are specialty sports channels, foreign language fare, kids programs, and so forth. Just like the magazines at a newsstand. And more are planned. These may be seen on cable but are more likely to turn up on the Internet or cell phone.

There are still some special interests out there that don't fit the cable TV programming model. Economics just can't warrant a sailing channel, a knitting channel or something along those lines. That's now changed, thanks to the Internet.

Let's take Sail.tv ([www.sail.tv](http://www.sail.tv)) as an example. Since there are very few sailing shows on cable, an entrepreneur in



*Sail.tv generally provides a small-screen view, but the video is smooth, with good sound.*

ing talk shows, product reviews, discussions about sailing techniques plus coverage of the smaller races that have no hope to make it to the big screen. Sail.tv's first month garnered 70,000 viewers.

This new net can reach a worldwide audience at a much lower initial cost

this programming might be, it turned out to be a big hit with the sailing community.

Dedicated small audiences can support a niche channel. There are now hundreds if not thousands of slivercasts in production. A large number of specialized networks that appeal to a small number of people can be a reality on the Internet.

Another upstart slivercaster is Yuks TV ([www.yuks.com](http://www.yuks.com)) based in Los Angeles. This net features clips from classic comedy television shows that include routines from Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Red Skelton and George Burns, among others. There are also vintage TV commercials that give us a look at

**Can you think of any cool, interesting new "Slivercast" networks?**

England started broadcasting on the Internet. It has since filled up with sailing shows, more than a satellite channel. Although it was unclear at the start how popular

## ***This hesitancy by big media companies has helped to open the door for independent producers to serve niche viewers.***

past pop culture icons. About 200,000 people a month visit this site. And advertisers have followed. Not all cable programmers agree

that there is an outlet for their niche product. One such player is ESPN, which tends to shy away from niche events like beach volleyball and focus on high profile programming. There is also a broadcast high quality visual aspect that may diminish ESPN's overall "look". Would small screens benefit from the big bucks that ESPN has invested in HD, for example?

### **Other Programming News**

In a recent development, former Walt Disney Co. honcho Michael Eisner is returning to childrens' programming. He is acquiring Team Baby Entertainment, which produces DVDs aimed at getting pre-schoolers to become enamored with their parents' favorite colleges. When you tell your friends that you heard about this tell them that this is no joke.

Also, the NCAA has been bragging it pulled off the biggest live event in the history of the Web. Based on final figures from CBS SportsLine, live streaming coverage of the NCAA tournament peaked at 268,000 simultaneous streams. More and more sports fans are catching their favorite sports streaming on the Internet. Can record breaking cell phone viewing be far behind?

A new Jewish culture network will soon debut on some Comcast systems. Shalom TV has just signed a carriage deal with Comcast offering the net as a subscription on-demand service in its greater Philadelphia and Northern Delaware systems. About 50 hours of SVOD programming will be available to digital subscribers. It will include English-language news from Israel.

The Big Ten is starting to explore the possibility of its own cable TV network. The conference's deal with ESPN and ABC expires following the 2006-2007 season and unless the contract can be extended the possibility of a Big Ten network remains an option. The types of sports have not been identified but an official announcement is expected shortly. **BBP**

### **About the Author**

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