

# Mobile and Web TV — Ready to Rock

Follow the network bounces, recycling old TV shows and refreshing old ideas

By Michael A. Kashmer ■ *Broadband Properties*

Look who's doing TV! New deals suggest that the era of mobile and Web-based television is fast upon us.

*Universal Music* and *EchoStar* have formed a new joint venture called *IMF*, *International Music Feed*. The venture made its debut at the National Cable Show in Atlanta. The lineup includes a host of international and American artists poised as a challenge to the music icon, *MTV*.

Former *MTV* music programming staffer Andy Schuon is leading this new venture. *EchoStar* is the only distribution outlet as of now but additional carriage deals are expected.

When *MTV* was founded in 1981, record execs felt left out because they couldn't control what *MTV* aired. Now that *MTV* has changed its format, moving away from just videos, *IMF* sees a chance to move in. Antitrust issues clouded *MTV* and the music distributor's goals; the federal government was afraid that the best videos would appear on the channel the distributors controlled, thereby denying access to other rival networks.

*IMF* will feature a bevy of international artists including Latin and increasingly popular South Asian music along with a healthy mix of American performers on Universal-owned labels such as the Black Eyed Peas.

## AOL Leverages Warner

*AOL* launched a broadband video Web site, *In2TV*, hoping to be a con-

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tender in the ever-popular on-line video business. *AOL* will offer some of the more than 400 (mainly old) TV series in the *Time Warner* library, free on line. Eventually this may evolve to a pay-to-download service like *Apple's iTunes*. Video options are predicted to explode over the next few years and *AOL* wants to be in on the action.

*In2TV's* distribution method may be new, but it is following a more traditional revenue model by inserting spots into the streaming episodes and running advertising banners on the site. Currently there are 30 series in six genres with advertisers just starting to come aboard. Ads will be limited to one or two minutes per half hour show.

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How will these off-the-air series play with the younger set? That remains to be seen. Some older hits like "*Growing Pains*" and "*Welcome Back Kotter*" come to mind and these may strike it rich again in this new format. If you really must know what John Travolta looked like with an Afro thirty years ago then this service may be for you. Also, I can't imagine doing a press tour with these hyper-talented but aging former stars. I am not sure that the kids would go for it.

More seriously though, this kind of service is very, very dependent on younger viewers and although *AOL* is a strong brand there is something a little "un-cool" about it with the younger set. Only time will tell if this venture is hip enough to brand *AOL* with younger customers.

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### Do We Really Need a TV Anymore?

Networks are falling over themselves to get their shows into anything that will take a digital signal. It is a brave new world out there and some recent blurbs at the New York advertising up-front buying spectacle included my favorite – “mobisodes!” I won’t keep you in suspense any longer, “mobisodes” are short television episodes especially made for viewing on a mobile telephone screen. Before you rush to your patent attorney, be advised that FOX has already trademarked the term. Advertisers are reported to be taking a wait-and-see attitude about the 2006-07 season until they can get a handle on the extensive range of emerging programming platforms. But what happens if *The Sopranos* ends up on a mobisode?

Everyone is trying to “engage” viewers and accommodate their multifaceted video needs. This is easier said than done however. *NBC Universal* is starting its “TV360” digital components, which include “webisodes” of such popular broadcast hits as “*The Office*.” Online viewers can preview new series and watch classic comedy programs from the network’s extensive archives.

CBS has TV’s first interactive reality game show, called “*Gold Rush*.” It will air only on the Web. This Mark Burnett production fits well with CBS’s blogs, podcasts and other “cool” ways of watching TV.

ABC is busy producing new mini-series that will be available only on mobile phones like “*LOST Video Diaries*.” This online game takes “*LOST*” fans on an international Easter egg hunt! Additional experiments include next-generation technology such as a site that will let fans of of *ABC* shows connect with each other.

### Soap Operas are Back and in Prime Time

Prime time schedules have turned over some prime real estate to episodic serialized programming. “Soaps” are known for their continuing story line, which requires viewers to watch every episode so that they can keep track of all the action.

Seasons end with the inevitable cliff-

hanger, which encourages fans to watch next time around. This works only if the soap had high enough ratings to be brought back for another spin.

A new broadcast network, *My Network TV* owned by Rupert Murdoch’s *News Corp.*, will fill its entire prime time schedule six nights a week with new soaps like “*Desire*” and “*Secret Obsession*.” These shows are intended to increase the emotional bond with viewers, particularly younger ones who are willing to follow a series from their TV to the Internet, iPods and cell phones. **BBP**

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