

MUSIC IN THE AIR

by Geoff Daily

The lights dim, the speakers crackle, the crowd quiets and the band begins to play.

But on the other side of the state, the country, or the world, some of the band's biggest fans are sitting at home, unable to support their favorite group however much they might like to do so.

Webcasting concerts gains popularity with bands and their fans.

For Sound Tribe Sector 9 (STS9), an instrumental electronic jam band, and Dark Star Orchestra, a Grateful Dead tribute band, leaving loyal fans out in the cold was a serious problem, and they knew the Internet was the place to look for an answer.

Both bands discovered StreamerNet (www.streamernet.com), a Leesburg, Virginia-based company that focuses on webcasting small to mid-sized events like STS9 and Dark Star Orchestra concerts and the International Slug Fest boxing series.

All Together Now

STS9 and Dark Star Orchestra are now webcasting their concerts with StreamerNet's MyTheater Content Distribution Portal, which combines a video window with a real-time, user-friendly chat room.

Even without the help of glow sticks, the chat room makes the webcast concerts into interactive communal experiences.

Tim Walther, manager of the Dark Star Orchestra, says, "It's obvious that some of these people know each other, as they're reminiscing about old times. You can tell they're having a really great time with it – a lot of the same people are coming back time and time again."

Webcasting lets the bands play for their entire fan community, no matter where they live. "We have fans all over the world and across the U.S.," says Walther, "and now from the comfort of their homes they can have that experience of watching the show live."

For STS9, according to manager Eric Pirritt, webcasting allowed them to reach more fans than they could fit into the concert hall during their five-night run in Boulder, Colorado, which had sold out months in advance.

Ticket to Ride

Selling tickets to the live webcasts is key to making webcasting a viable business move for the bands, and StreamerNet's V*TICKET e-commerce solution makes this easy.

V*TICKET also lets the bands sell tickets for post-show rebroadcasts. "At the venue, you're able to go to the merchandise table and purchase a V*TICKET, which has a sticker on it with their sign-in info," says Walther. "It's a tangible thing, so you feel like you've bought something."



Many bands already sell CDs of their concert performances, but archived webcasts are "a lot less costly and a lot more efficient," in Walther's words.

"We don't have to have an extra sound engineer there. We don't have to worry about setting all that equipment up each time to produce the CDs. Being able to sell virtual tickets seems like the way of the future," Walther continues. "I think a year or two from now this will be pretty commonplace, but for now we're on the cutting edge of technology."

Pennies from Heaven

Usually, being on the cutting edge of technology requires a major investment of money and time. StreamerNet's goal is to eliminate both of those barriers.

The company's target market is small to mid-sized webcasters, and its pricing reflects this. The basic package offers everything needed to stream up to 275,000 viewer minutes per month of live or on-demand video from the customer's website for \$125 a month. (Many customers, of course, add extra features like the MyTheater Content Distribution Portal.)

In some cases, StreamerNet reduces its fixed fees in exchange for a cut of the V*TICKET revenues. STS9's revenue-sharing arrangement with StreamerNet meant that they only needed to sell forty virtual tickets to their Boulder show (in addition to

the six thousand real tickets already sold) to turn a profit on the webcast.

"Two years ago, it would have cost us ten times as much money to do, but the financial evolution of the technology is catching up to make it more affordable," says Pirritt. "Now, through a company like StreamerNet, it's pennies on the impression."

Hook Me Up

StreamerNet's Mobile



Video Producer (MVP) is the heart of the production software. To begin webcasting, users simply connect their video and audio feeds to a laptop with the MVP software and then hook it up to a broadband connection. "For a band that has many other things to worry about when putting on a show, we wouldn't be able to do a video shoot very often if it wasn't simple to do, and with StreamerNet it's very easy for us to set up," says Walther.


There is still one wild card: connectivity. While sheer capacity isn't much of an issue, a stable broadband connection is crucial to the success of a webcast. "You need to make sure the landline connection is uninterrupted so that your webcast is uninterrupted," says Walther. "You wouldn't want credit card machines or other people downloading video to interfere with the stream your fans are seeing."

In some areas of the country, such as the Southeast, as few as one out of three venues have adequate connectivity, according to Walther. Pirritt adds, "For some of these smaller venues, the last thing on their list of priorities is a T1 line." But the closer the venue is to major markets, the better the available connectivity.

In with the In Crowd

Both STS9 and Dark Star Orchestra feel confident of establishing significant new revenue streams through broadband, even if their first forays into webcasting haven't drawn huge audiences.

Walther says, "I see this as a word-of-mouth thing, where people need to experience it first to understand the value. As the word continues to get out, I'm sure our online audience will keep growing."

"Maybe only a couple hundred people watched those first few nights, but thousands of people heard about it and thousands of people were talking about it. That, to me, is worth more than money in the bank," says Pirritt. 

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SIVOO SPELLS ENTERTAINMENT IN ANY LANGUAGE

by Masha Zager

The Census Bureau says that 32 million people in the United States speak Spanish at home. SIVOO thinks the number is even higher. About 2 million U.S. residents speak Chinese at home, according to the Census; again, SIVOO suspects there are more. Whatever the precise numbers, there's no question that foreign-language speakers in the U.S. constitute a huge and rapidly growing group – close to 20 percent of the population – and that they are poorly served with entertainment programming. This is the gap that SIVOO aims to fill.

The company launched in October 2006 as an Internet-based video-on-demand provider with channels in Spanish, Chinese and Hindi, and has been growing its audience steadily ever since. This June, through a licensing arrangement with satellite broadcaster GlobeCast WorldTV, it will add content in 16 more languages ranging from Russian to Cambodian.

Moving Beyond Video Clips

"We believe in the value proposition of long-form entertainment content via IP," says chief operating officer Chris Myers. In contrast to the brief, low-quality clips that make up most of Internet vid-



eo viewing, SIVOO streams feature-length movies and episodes of television shows in full-screen mode at 30 frames per second. The stream travels at 800 Kbps, so viewers need high-quality broadband connections. If and when SIVOO adds high-definition service, even higher bandwidth will be required.

SIVOO's destination site, www.sivoo.com, offers a catalog of more than 20,000 hours of programming from many top entertainment producers and distributors worldwide. However, the company doesn't restrict viewers to its own site. SIVOO-branded programs can be found at a variety of other Internet sites including Brightcove, Google Video and YouTube.

In addition, last month SIVOO announced a deal with Verizon to deliver programming over the FiOS TV video-on-demand service. (FiOS is Verizon's fiber-to-the-home network; while