

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. 

Geoff Daily is the assistant editor of Killer App Magazine. He can be reached at geoffd@killerapp.com.

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

FiOS TV's scheduled programming is still broadcast using analog technology, its VoD service is delivered over IP.) Rather than maintaining SIVOO's entire film library, Verizon makes a small selection of films available to its viewers and plans to refresh the selection each month. The selection for March included 19 movies in three languages, several of them award winners.

For the moment, SIVOO viewers have a choice between a huge film library on the PC and a small selection on the television. However, unlike some other companies with similar services, such as Neulion, SIVOO does not provide devices for its customers to redirect Internet content to their television sets. "We don't want to be in the set-top box business, or selling cables," Myers says. He explains that SIVOO is better off remaining technology-agnostic since so many other companies are providing Internet-to-TV devices – think Apple TV and Microsoft Xbox – and since wireless networks are expected to support television plugins within the next year or two. "The problem will take care of itself," Myers adds.

Not that there is much of a problem, anyway. In spite of often-voiced doubts about whether viewers are ready to watch full-length content in "lean-forward" mode on the PC, SIVOO's viewers seem happy with the experience. The number of viewers who watch programs from beginning to end ranges from 60 - 70 percent for Hindi movies to above 80 percent for Spanish-language telenovelas, or TV serial dramas.

In addition to being agnostic about TV delivery, SIVOO accommodates various video formats. While it has chosen the Windows Media format for Sivoo.com, "we could also use Flash or Quicktime," Myers explains. The company is open to any standard player that streams video immediately.

It does use proprietary technology for content intake, coding and management, however.

Casting a Wide Net

SIVOO's philosophy is to make its service easy and barrier-free, in order to cast a wide net and attract as many viewers as possible. No registration or membership is



"Entertainment isn't the only story. The audience is underserved in other segments."



required at Sivoo.com, and most of the programming is free, allowing viewers to gain an appreciation of SIVOO's quality without a financial commitment.

Free programming is viable, Myers says, because SIVOO's ability to aggregate language groups helps it attract major brands as advertisers. While there may not be enough Hindi speakers in, say, Minneapolis to interest advertisers in a local Hindi station, the potential national audience is large enough to be taken seriously. SIVOO encourages its content providers to let it distribute older, or "catalog" content on an ad-supported basis,

and to pay for the content by sharing ad revenues with them.

The ad-supported content draws in the subset of viewers who are willing to pay transaction fees for premium content – new or award-winning material – which is provided on a pay-per-view basis. Even for this group, SIVOO keeps the pricing structure simple and low: \$1.99 for TV shows and \$3.99 for movies.

An even smaller proportion of dedicated viewers is expected to respond to the subscription offerings that the company plans to add this spring. The subscription channels will feature news and sports from the audience's home countries. "Entertainment isn't the only story," Myers says. "The audience is underserved in other segments." News and sports will be offered in bundles of three to seven channels, each one showing live streaming broadcasts (or almost-live, for those who don't want to watch soccer games in the middle of the night). Popular sporting events will remain available on a VoD basis for a month or two.

Some of the news and special-interest broadcasts will be created at a new production facility that SIVOO has just finished setting up. The studio started out by creating promotional videos and station breaks, but will soon move on to more ambitious projects. Myers believes that SIVOO's deep understanding of its audiences will enable it to appeal to the needs of foreign-language speakers in the U.S., about half of whom are bilingual and half entirely non-English speaking.

Myers recalls discussions about recruiting a certain Bollywood star to record a station break for SIVOO. "He's the number one brand in the world after Coca-Cola," Myers says, noting that the star isn't appearing on other American TV stations. "No one in this country understands the magnitude of the opportunity." 