Digital flag furled for home networks

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Fox Entertainment Group and IBM are working together on technology that will allow home networks to show copy-protected TV shows, while restricting the shows to their home market. Central to the issue is a broadcast "flag" that will be embedded in digital broadcasts beginning in July. Mandated by the Federal Communications Commission, the flag is designed to help prevent unauthorized redistribution of content over the Internet.

The problem is to allow distribution in a home network. Until the Fox-IBM collaboration, the only way to reduce unauthorized distribution of flagged content was to measure the time it takes the data to travel to another device in the network. But that meant that devices had to be close together, not always the case in home networks.

Under the new system, content protection is based on Defined Market Areas (DMAs), the area served by the broadcast channel. Viewers can thus receive digital programming and watch it on any device in a home network, as long as it's within the same DMA.

"Protecting content in a way that also provides flexible use for consumers is an industry imperative," said Steve Canepa, vice president, IBM Media & Entertainment Industry. "Usability is a critical success factor for the widespread adoption of digital content distribution and protection techniques; IBM and Fox are developing an innovative business solution that benefits viewers and broadcasters alike."

The companies expect to complete the development in the first few

months of 2006.

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